

THE FORGED COUPON

PART FIRST

I

FEDOR MIHAILOVICH SMOKOVNIKOV, the president of the local Income Tax Department, a man of unswerving honesty--and proud of it, too--a gloomy Liberal, a free-thinker, and an enemy to every manifestation of religious feeling, which he thought a relic of superstition, came home from his office feeling very much annoyed. The Governor of the province had sent him an extraordinarily stupid minute, almost assuming that his dealings had been dishonest.

Fedor Mihailovich felt embittered, and wrote at once a sharp answer. On his return home everything seemed to go contrary to his wishes.

It was five minutes to five, and he expected the dinner to be served at once, but he was told it was not ready. He banged the door and went to his study. Somebody knocked at the door. "Who the devil is that?" he thought; and shouted,--"Who is there?"

The door opened and a boy of fifteen came in, the son of Fedor Mihailovich, a pupil of the fifth class of the local school.

"What do you want?"

"It is the first of the month to-day, father."

"Well! You want your money?"

It had been arranged that the father should pay his son a monthly allowance of three roubles as pocket money. Fedor Mihailovich frowned, took out of his pocket-book a coupon of two roubles fifty kopeks which he found among the bank-notes, and added to it fifty kopeks in silver out of the loose change in his purse. The boy kept silent, and did not take the money his father proffered him.

"Father, please give me some more in advance."

"What?"

"I would not ask for it, but I have borrowed a small sum from a friend, and promised upon my word of honour to pay it off. My honour is dear to me, and that is why I want another three roubles. I don't like asking you; but, please, father, give me another three roubles."

"I have told you--"

"I know, father, but just for once."

"You have an allowance of three roubles and you ought to be content. I had not fifty kopeks when I was your age."

"Now, all my comrades have much more. Petrov and Ivanitsky have fifty roubles a month."

"And I tell you that if you behave like them you will be a scoundrel. Mind that."

"What is there to mind? You never understand my position. I shall be disgraced if I don't pay my debt. It is all very well for you to speak as you do."

"Be off, you silly boy! Be off!"

Fedor Mihailovich jumped from his seat and pounced upon his son. "Be off, I say!" he shouted. "You deserve a good thrashing, all you boys!"

His son was at once frightened and embittered. The bitterness was even greater than the fright. With his head bent down he hastily turned to the door. Fedor Mihailovich did not intend to strike him, but he was glad to vent his wrath, and went on shouting and abusing the boy till he

had closed the door.

When the maid came in to announce that dinner was ready, Fedor Mihailovich rose.

"At last!" he said. "I don't feel hungry any longer."

He went to the dining-room with a sullen face. At table his wife made some remark, but he gave her such a short and angry answer that she abstained from further speech. The son also did not lift his eyes from his plate, and was silent all the time. The trio finished their dinner in silence, rose from the table and separated, without a word.

After dinner the boy went to his room, took the coupon and the change out of his pocket, and threw the money on the table. After that he took off his uniform and put on a jacket.

He sat down to work, and began to study Latin grammar out of a dog's-eared book. After a while he rose, closed and bolted the door, shifted the money into a drawer, took out some cigarette papers, rolled one up, stuffed it with cotton wool, and began to smoke.

He spent nearly two hours over his grammar and writing books without understanding a word of what he saw before him; then he rose and began to stamp up and down the room, trying to recollect all that his father had said to him. All the abuse showered upon him, and worst of all his

father's angry face, were as fresh in his memory as if he saw and heard them all over again. "Silly boy! You ought to get a good thrashing!" And the more he thought of it the angrier he grew. He remembered also how his father said: "I see what a scoundrel you will turn out. I know you will. You are sure to become a cheat, if you go on like that." He had certainly forgotten how he felt when he was young! "What crime have I committed, I wonder? I wanted to go to the theatre, and having no money borrowed some from Petia Grouchetsky. Was that so very wicked of me? Another father would have been sorry for me; would have asked how it all happened; whereas he just called me names. He never thinks of anything but himself. When it is he who has not got something he wants--that is a different matter! Then all the house is upset by his shouts. And I--I am a scoundrel, a cheat, he says. No, I don't love him, although he is my father. It may be wrong, but I hate him."

There was a knock at the door. The servant brought a letter--a message from his friend. "They want an answer," said the servant.

The letter ran as follows: "I ask you now for the third time to pay me back the six roubles you have borrowed; you are trying to avoid me. That is not the way an honest man ought to behave. Will you please send the amount by my messenger? I am myself in a frightful fix. Can you not get the money somewhere?--Yours, according to whether you send the money or not, with scorn, or love, Grouchetsky."

"There we have it! Such a pig! Could he not wait a while? I will have

another try."

Mitia went to his mother. This was his last hope. His mother was very kind, and hardly ever refused him anything. She would probably have helped him this time also out of his trouble, but she was in great anxiety: her younger child, Petia, a boy of two, had fallen ill. She got angry with Mitia for rushing so noisily into the nursery, and refused him almost without listening to what he had to say. Mitia muttered something to himself and turned to go. The mother felt sorry for him. "Wait, Mitia," she said; "I have not got the money you want now, but I will get it for you to-morrow."

But Mitia was still raging against his father.

"What is the use of having it to-morrow, when I want it to-day? I am going to see a friend. That is all I have got to say."

He went out, banging the door. . . .

"Nothing else is left to me. He will tell me how to pawn my watch," he thought, touching his watch in his pocket.

Mitia went to his room, took the coupon and the watch from the drawer, put on his coat, and went to Mahin.

II

MAHIN was his schoolfellow, his senior, a grown-up young man with a moustache. He gambled, had a large feminine acquaintance, and always had ready cash. He lived with his aunt. Mitia quite realised that Mahin was not a respectable fellow, but when he was in his company he could not help doing what he wished. Mahin was in when Mitia called, and was just preparing to go to the theatre. His untidy room smelt of scented soap and eau-de-Cologne.

"That's awful, old chap," said Mahin, when Mitia telling him about his troubles, showed the coupon and the fifty kopeks, and added that he wanted nine roubles more. "We might, of course, go and pawn your watch. But we might do something far better." And Mahin winked an eye.

"What's that?"

"Something quite simple." Mahin took the coupon in his hand. "Put ONE before the 2.50 and it will be 12.50."

"But do such coupons exist?"

"Why, certainly; the thousand roubles notes have coupons of 12.50. I have cashed one in the same way."

"You don't say so?"

"Well, yes or no?" asked Mahin, taking the pen and smoothing the coupon with the fingers of his left hand.

"But it is wrong."

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense, indeed," thought Mitia, and again his father's hard words came back to his memory. "Scoundrel! As you called me that, I might as well be it." He looked into Mahin's face. Mahin looked at him, smiling with perfect ease.

"Well?" he said.

"All right. I don't mind."

Mahin carefully wrote the unit in front of 2.50.

"Now let us go to the shop across the road; they sell photographers' materials there. I just happen to want a frame--for this young person here." He took out of his pocket a photograph of a young lady with large eyes, luxuriant hair, and an uncommonly well-developed bust.

"Is she not sweet? Eh?"

"Yes, yes . . . of course . . ."

"Well, you see.--But let us go."

Mahin took his coat, and they left the house.

III

THE two boys, having rung the door-bell, entered the empty shop, which had shelves along the walls and photographic appliances on them, together with show-cases on the counters. A plain woman, with a kind face, came through the inner door and asked from behind the counter what they required.

"A nice frame, if you please, madam."

"At what price?" asked the woman; she wore mittens on her swollen fingers with which she rapidly handled picture-frames of different shapes.

"These are fifty kopeks each; and these are a little more expensive. There is rather a pretty one, of quite a new style; one rouble and twenty kopeks."

"All right, I will have this. But could not you make it cheaper? Let us say one rouble."

"We don't bargain in our shop," said the shopkeeper with a dignified air.

"Well, I will take it," said Mahin, and put the coupon on the counter.

"Wrap up the frame and give me change. But please be quick. We must be

off to the theatre, and it is getting late."

"You have plenty of time," said the shopkeeper, examining the coupon very closely because of her shortsightedness.

"It will look lovely in that frame, don't you think so?" said Mahin, turning to Mitia.

"Have you no small change?" asked the shop-woman.

"I am sorry, I have not. My father gave me that, so I have to cash it."

"But surely you have one rouble twenty?"

"I have only fifty kopeks in cash. But what are you afraid of? You don't think, I suppose, that we want to cheat you and give you bad money?"

"Oh, no; I don't mean anything of the sort."

"You had better give it to me back. We will cash it somewhere else."

"How much have I to pay you back? Eleven and something."

She made a calculation on the counter, opened the desk, took out a ten-roubles note, looked for change and added to the sum six twenty-kopeks coins and two five-kopek pieces.

"Please make a parcel of the frame," said Mahin, taking the money in a leisurely fashion.

"Yes, sir." She made a parcel and tied it with a string.

Mitia only breathed freely when the door bell rang behind them, and they were again in the street.

"There are ten roubles for you, and let me have the rest. I will give it back to you."

Mahin went off to the theatre, and Mitia called on Grouchetsky to repay the money he had borrowed from him.

IV

AN hour after the boys were gone Eugene Mihailovich, the owner of the shop, came home, and began to count his receipts.

"Oh, you clumsy fool! Idiot that you are!" he shouted, addressing his wife, after having seen the coupon and noticed the forgery.

"But I have often seen you, Eugene, accepting coupons in payment, and precisely twelve rouble ones," retorted his wife, very humiliated, grieved, and all but bursting into tears. "I really don't know how they contrived to cheat me," she went on. "They were pupils of the school, in uniform. One of them was quite a handsome boy, and looked so comme il faut."

"A comme il faut fool, that is what you are!" The husband went on scolding her, while he counted the cash. . . . When I accept coupons, I see what is written on them. And you probably looked only at the boys' pretty faces. "You had better behave yourself in your old age."

His wife could not stand this, and got into a fury.

"That is just like you men! Blaming everybody around you. But when it is you who lose fifty-four roubles at cards--that is of no consequence in your eyes."

"That is a different matter

"I don't want to talk to you," said his wife, and went to her room.

There she began to remind herself that her family was opposed to her marriage, thinking her present husband far below her in social rank, and that it was she who insisted on marrying him. Then she went on thinking of the child she had lost, and how indifferent her husband had been to their loss. She hated him so intensely at that moment that she wished for his death. Her wish frightened her, however, and she hurriedly began to dress and left the house. When her husband came from the shop to the inner rooms of their flat she was gone. Without waiting for him she had dressed and gone off to friends--a teacher of French in the school, a Russified Pole, and his wife--who had invited her and her husband to a party in their house that evening.

THE guests at the party had tea and cakes offered to them, and sat down after that to play whist at a number of card-tables.

The partners of Eugene Mihailovich's wife were the host himself, an officer, and an old and very stupid lady in a wig, a widow who owned a music-shop; she loved playing cards and played remarkably well. But it was Eugene Mihailovich's wife who was the winner all the time. The best cards were continually in her hands. At her side she had a plate with grapes and a pear and was in the best of spirits.

"And Eugene Mihailovich? Why is he so late?" asked the hostess, who played at another table.

"Probably busy settling accounts," said Eugene Mihailovich's wife. "He has to pay off the tradesmen, to get in firewood." The quarrel she had with her husband revived in her memory; she frowned, and her hands, from which she had not taken off the mittens, shook with fury against him.

"Oh, there he is.--We have just been speaking of you," said the hostess to Eugene Mihailovich, who came in at that very moment. "Why are you so late?"

"I was busy," answered Eugene Mihailovich, in a gay voice, rubbing his hands. And to his wife's surprise he came to her side and said,--"You

know, I managed to get rid of the coupon."

"No! You don't say so!"

"Yes, I used it to pay for a cartload of firewood I bought from a peasant."

And Eugene Mihailovich related with great indignation to the company present--his wife adding more details to his narrative--how his wife had been cheated by two unscrupulous schoolboys.

"Well, and now let us sit down to work," he said, taking his place at one of the whist-tables when his turn came, and beginning to shuffle the cards.

EUGENE MIHAILOVICH had actually used the coupon to buy firewood from the peasant Ivan Mironov, who had thought of setting up in business on the seventeen roubles he possessed. He hoped in this way to earn another eight roubles, and with the twenty-five roubles thus amassed he intended to buy a good strong horse, which he would want in the spring for work in the fields and for driving on the roads, as his old horse was almost played out.

Ivan Mironov's commercial method consisted in buying from the stores a cord of wood and dividing it into five cartloads, and then driving about the town, selling each of these at the price the stores charged for a quarter of a cord. That unfortunate day Ivan Mironov drove out very early with half a cartload, which he soon sold. He loaded up again with another cartload which he hoped to sell, but he looked in vain for a customer; no one would buy it. It was his bad luck all that day to come across experienced towns-people, who knew all the tricks of the peasants in selling firewood, and would not believe that he had actually brought the wood from the country as he assured them. He got hungry, and felt cold in his ragged woollen coat. It was nearly below zero when evening came on; his horse which he had treated without mercy, hoping soon to sell it to the knacker's yard, refused to move a step. So Ivan Mironov was quite ready to sell his firewood at a loss when he met Eugene Mihailovich, who was on his way home from the tobacconist.

"Buy my cartload of firewood, sir. I will give it to you cheap. My poor horse is tired, and can't go any farther."

"Where do you come from?"

"From the country, sir. This firewood is from our place. Good dry wood, I can assure you."

"Good wood indeed! I know your tricks. Well, what is your price?"

Ivan Mironov began by asking a high price, but reduced it once, and finished by selling the cartload for just what it had cost him.

"I'm giving it to you cheap, just to please you, sir.--Besides, I am glad it is not a long way to your house," he added.

Eugene Mihailovich did not bargain very much. He did not mind paying a little more, because he was delighted to think he could make use of the coupon and get rid of it. With great difficulty Ivan Mironov managed at last, by pulling the shafts himself, to drag his cart into the courtyard, where he was obliged to unload the firewood unaided and pile it up in the shed. The yard-porter was out. Ivan Mironov hesitated at first to accept the coupon, but Eugene Mihailovich insisted, and as he looked a very important person the peasant at last agreed.

He went by the backstairs to the servants' room, crossed himself before

the ikon, wiped his beard which was covered with icicles, turned up the skirts of his coat, took out of his pocket a leather purse, and out of the purse eight roubles and fifty kopeks, and handed the change to Eugene Mihailovich. Carefully folding the coupon, he put it in the purse. Then, according to custom, he thanked the gentleman for his kindness, and, using the whip-handle instead of the lash, he belaboured the half-frozen horse that he had doomed to an early death, and betook himself to a public-house.

Arriving there, Ivan Mironov called for vodka and tea for which he paid eight kopeks. Comfortable and warm after the tea, he chatted in the very best of spirits with a yard-porter who was sitting at his table. Soon he grew communicative and told his companion all about the conditions of his life. He told him he came from the village Vassilievsky, twelve miles from town, and also that he had his allotment of land given to him by his family, as he wanted to live apart from his father and his brothers; that he had a wife and two children; the elder boy went to school, and did not yet help him in his work. He also said he lived in lodgings and intended going to the horse-fair the next day to look for a good horse, and, may be, to buy one. He went on to state that he had now nearly twenty-five roubles--only one rouble short--and that half of it was a coupon. He took the coupon out of his purse to show to his new friend. The yard-porter was an illiterate man, but he said he had had such coupons given him by lodgers to change; that they were good; but that one might also chance on forged ones; so he advised the peasant, for the sake of security, to change it at once at the counter. Ivan

Mironov gave the coupon to the waiter and asked for change. The waiter, however, did not bring the change, but came back with the manager, a bald-headed man with a shining face, who was holding the coupon in his fat hand.

"Your money is no good," he said, showing the coupon, but apparently determined not to give it back.

"The coupon must be all right. I got it from a gentleman."

"It is bad, I tell you. The coupon is forged."

"Forged? Give it back to me."

"I will not. You fellows have got to be punished for such tricks. Of course, you did it yourself--you and some of your rascally friends."

"Give me the money. What right have you--"

"Sidor! Call a policeman," said the barman to the waiter. Ivan Mironov was rather drunk, and in that condition was hard to manage. He seized the manager by the collar and began to shout.

"Give me back my money, I say. I will go to the gentleman who gave it to me. I know where he lives."

The manager had to struggle with all his force to get loose from Ivan Mironov, and his shirt was torn,--"Oh, that's the way you behave! Get hold of him."

The waiter took hold of Ivan Mironov; at that moment the policeman arrived. Looking very important, he inquired what had happened, and unhesitatingly gave his orders:

"Take him to the police-station."

As to the coupon, the policeman put it in his pocket; Ivan Mironov, together with his horse, was brought to the nearest station.

VII

IVAN MIRONOV had to spend the night in the police-station, in the company of drunkards and thieves. It was noon of the next day when he was summoned to the police officer; put through a close examination, and sent in the care of a policeman to Eugene Mihailovich's shop. Ivan Mironov remembered the street and the house.

The policeman asked for the shopkeeper, showed him the coupon and confronted him with Ivan Mironov, who declared that he had received the coupon in that very place. Eugene Mihailovich at once assumed a very severe and astonished air.

"You are mad, my good fellow," he said. "I have never seen this man before in my life," he added, addressing the policeman.

"It is a sin, sir," said Ivan Mironov. "Think of the hour when you will die."

"Why, you must be dreaming! You have sold your firewood to some one else," said Eugene Mihailovich. "But wait a minute. I will go and ask my wife whether she bought any firewood yesterday." Eugene Mihailovich left them and immediately called the yard-porter Vassily, a strong, handsome, quick, cheerful, well-dressed man.

He told Vassily that if any one should inquire where the last supply of

firewood was bought, he was to say they'd got it from the stores, and not from a peasant in the street.

"A peasant has come," he said to Vassily, "who has declared to the police that I gave him a forged coupon. He is a fool and talks nonsense, but you, are a clever man. Mind you say that we always get the firewood from the stores. And, by the way, I've been thinking some time of giving you money to buy a new jacket," added Eugene Mihailovich, and gave the man five roubles. Vassily looking with pleasure first at the five rouble note, then at Eugene Mihailovich's face, shook his head and smiled.

"I know, those peasant folks have no brains. Ignorance, of course. Don't you be uneasy. I know what I have to say."

Ivan Mironov, with tears in his eyes, implored Eugene Mihailovich over and over again to acknowledge the coupon he had given him, and the yard-porter to believe what he said, but it proved quite useless; they both insisted that they had never bought firewood from a peasant in the street. The policeman brought Ivan Mironov back to the police-station, and he was charged with forging the coupon. Only after taking the advice of a drunken office clerk in the same cell with him, and bribing the police officer with five roubles, did Ivan Mironov get out of jail, without the coupon, and with only seven roubles left out of the twenty-five he had the day before.

Of these seven roubles he spent three in the public-house and came home

to his wife dead drunk, with a bruised and swollen face.

His wife was expecting a child, and felt very ill. She began to scold her husband; he pushed her away, and she struck him. Without answering a word he lay down on the plank and began to weep bitterly.

Not till the next day did he tell his wife what had actually happened. She believed him at once, and thoroughly cursed the dastardly rich man who had cheated Ivan. He was sobered now, and remembering the advice a workman had given him, with whom he had many a drink the day before, decided to go to a lawyer and tell him of the wrong the owner of the photograph shop had done him.

VIII

THE lawyer consented to take proceedings on behalf of Ivan Mironov, not so much for the sake of the fee, as because he believed the peasant, and was revolted by the wrong done to him.

Both parties appeared in the court when the case was tried, and the yard-porter Vassily was summoned as witness. They repeated in the court all they had said before to the police officials. Ivan Mironov again called to his aid the name of the Divinity, and reminded the shopkeeper of the hour of death. Eugene Mihailovich, although quite aware of his wickedness, and the risks he was running, despite the rebukes of his conscience, could not now change his testimony, and went on calmly to deny all the allegations made against him.

The yard-porter Vassily had received another ten roubles from his master, and, quite unperturbed, asserted with a smile that he did not know anything about Ivan Mironov. And when he was called upon to take the oath, he overcame his inner qualms, and repeated with assumed ease the terms of the oath, read to him by the old priest appointed to the court. By the holy Cross and the Gospel, he swore that he spoke the whole truth.

The case was decided against Ivan Mironov, who was sentenced to pay five roubles for expenses. This sum Eugene Mihailovich generously paid for him. Before dismissing Ivan Mironov, the judge severely admonished him,

saying he ought to take care in the future not to accuse respectable people, and that he also ought to be thankful that he was not forced to pay the costs, and that he had escaped a prosecution for slander, for which he would have been condemned to three months' imprisonment.

"I offer my humble thanks," said Ivan Mironov; and, shaking his head, left the court with a heavy sigh.

The whole thing seemed to have ended well for Eugene Mihailovich and the yard-porter Vassily. But only in appearance. Something had happened which was not noticed by any one, but which was much more important than all that had been exposed to view.

Vassily had left his village and settled in town over two years ago. As time went on he sent less and less money to his father, and he did not ask his wife, who remained at home, to join him. He was in no need of her; he could in town have as many wives as he wished, and much better ones too than that clumsy, village-bred woman. Vassily, with each recurring year, became more and more familiar with the ways of the town people, forgetting the conventions of a country life. There everything was so vulgar, so grey, so poor and untidy. Here, in town, all seemed on the contrary so refined, nice, clean, and rich; so orderly too. And he became more and more convinced that people in the country live just like wild beasts, having no idea of what life is, and that only life in town is real. He read books written by clever writers, and went to the performances in the Peoples' Palace. In the country, people would not

see such wonders even in dreams. In the country old men say: "Obey the law, and live with your wife; work; don't eat too much; don't care for finery," while here, in town, all the clever and learned people--those, of course, who know what in reality the law is--only pursue their own pleasures. And they are the better for it.

Previous to the incident of the forged coupon, Vassily could not actually believe that rich people lived without any moral law. But after that, still more after having perjured himself, and not being the worse for it in spite of his fears--on the contrary, he had gained ten roubles out of it--Vassily became firmly convinced that no moral laws whatever exist, and that the only thing to do is to pursue one's own interests and pleasures. This he now made his rule in life. He accordingly got as much profit as he could out of purchasing goods for lodgers. But this did not pay all his expenses. Then he took to stealing, whenever chance offered--money and all sorts of valuables. One day he stole a purse full of money from Eugene Mihailovich, but was found out. Eugene Mihailovich did not hand him over to the police, but dismissed him on the spot.

Vassily had no wish whatever to return home to his village, and remained in Moscow with his sweetheart, looking out for a new job. He got one as yard-porter at a grocer's, but with only small wages. The next day after he had entered that service he was caught stealing bags. The grocer did not call in the police, but gave him a good thrashing and turned him out. After that he could not find work. The money he had left was soon gone; he had to sell all his clothes and went about nearly in rags. His

sweetheart left him. But notwithstanding, he kept up his high spirits,
and when the spring came he started to walk home.

IX

PETER NIKOLAEVICH SVENTIZKY, a short man in black spectacles (he had weak eyes, and was threatened with complete blindness), got up, as was his custom, at dawn of day, had a cup of tea, and putting on his short fur coat trimmed with astrachan, went to look after the work on his estate.

Peter Nikolaevich had been an official in the Customs, and had gained eighteen thousand roubles during his service. About twelve years ago he quitted the service--not quite of his own accord: as a matter of fact he had been compelled to leave--and bought an estate from a young landowner who had dissipated his fortune. Peter Nikolaevich had married at an earlier period, while still an official in the Customs. His wife, who belonged to an old noble family, was an orphan, and was left without money. She was a tall, stoutish, good-looking woman. They had no children. Peter Nikolaevich had considerable practical talents and a strong will. He was the son of a Polish gentleman, and knew nothing about agriculture and land management; but when he acquired an estate of his own, he managed it so well that after fifteen years the waste piece of land, consisting of three hundred acres, became a model estate. All the buildings, from the dwelling-house to the corn stores and the shed for the fire engine were solidly built, had iron roofs, and were painted at the right time. In the tool house carts, ploughs, harrows, stood in perfect order, the harness was well cleaned and oiled. The horses were not very big, but all home-bred, grey, well fed, strong and devoid of

blemish.

The threshing machine worked in a roofed barn, the forage was kept in a separate shed, and a paved drain was made from the stables. The cows were home-bred, not very large, but giving plenty of milk; fowls were also kept in the poultry yard, and the hens were of a special kind, laying a great quantity of eggs. In the orchard the fruit trees were well whitewashed and propped on poles to enable them to grow straight. Everything was looked after--solid, clean, and in perfect order. Peter Nikolaevich rejoiced in the perfect condition of his estate, and was proud to have achieved it--not by oppressing the peasants, but, on the contrary, by the extreme fairness of his dealings with them.

Among the nobles of his province he belonged to the advanced party, and was more inclined to liberal than conservative views, always taking the side of the peasants against those who were still in favour of serfdom. "Treat them well, and they will be fair to you," he used to say. Of course, he did not overlook any carelessness on the part of those who worked on his estate, and he urged them on to work if they were lazy; but then he gave them good lodging, with plenty of good food, paid their wages without any delay, and gave them drinks on days of festival.

Walking cautiously on the melting snow--for the time of the year was February--Peter Nikolaevich passed the stables, and made his way to the cottage where his workmen were lodged. It was still dark, the darker because of the dense fog; but the windows of the cottage were lighted.

The men had already got up. His intention was to urge them to begin work. He had arranged that they should drive out to the forest and bring back the last supply of firewood he needed before spring.

"What is that?" he thought, seeing the door of the stable wide open.

"Hallo, who is there?"

No answer. Peter Nikolaevich stepped into the stable. It was dark; the ground was soft under his feet, and the air smelt of dung; on the right side of the door were two loose boxes for a pair of grey horses. Peter Nikolaevich stretched out his hand in their direction--one box was empty. He put out his foot--the horse might have been lying down. But his foot did not touch anything solid. "Where could they have taken the horse?" he thought. They certainly had not harnessed it; all the sledges stood still outside. Peter Nikolaevich went out of the stable.

"Stepan, come here!" he called.

Stepan was the head of the workmen's gang. He was just stepping out of the cottage.

"Here I am!" he said, in a cheerful voice. "Oh, is that you, Peter Nikolaevich? Our men are coming."

"Why is the stable door open?"

"Is it? I don't know anything about it. I say, Proshka, bring the lantern!"

Proshka came with the lantern. They all went to the stable, and Stepan knew at once what had happened.

"Thieves have been here, Peter Nikolaevich," he said. "The lock is broken."

"No; you don't say so!"

"Yes, the brigands! I don't see 'Mashka.' 'Hawk' is here. But 'Beauty' is not. Nor yet 'Dapple-grey.'"

Three horses had been stolen!

Peter Nikolaevich did not utter a word at first. He only frowned and took deep breaths.

"Oh," he said after a while. "If only I could lay hands on them! Who was on guard?"

"Peter. He evidently fell asleep."

Peter Nikolaevich called in the police, and making an appeal to all the authorities, sent his men to track the thieves. But the horses were not

to be found.

"Wicked people," said Peter Nikolaevich. "How could they! I was always so kind to them. Now, wait! Brigands! Brigands the whole lot of them. I will no longer be kind."

X

IN the meanwhile the horses, the grey ones, had all been disposed of; Mashka was sold to the gipsies for eighteen roubles; Dapple-grey was exchanged for another horse, and passed over to another peasant who lived forty miles away from the estate; and Beauty died on the way. The man who conducted the whole affair was--Ivan Mironov. He had been employed on the estate, and knew all the whereabouts of Peter Nikolaevich. He wanted to get back the money he had lost, and stole the horses for that reason.

After his misfortune with the forged coupon, Ivan Mironov took to drink; and all he possessed would have gone on drink if it had not been for his wife, who locked up his clothes, the horses' collars, and all the rest of what he would otherwise have squandered in public-houses. In his drunken state Ivan Mironov was continually thinking, not only of the man who had wronged him, but of all the rich people who live on robbing the poor. One day he had a drink with some peasants from the suburbs of Podolsk, and was walking home together with them. On the way the peasants, who were completely drunk, told him they had stolen a horse from a peasant's cottage. Ivan Mironov got angry, and began to abuse the horse-thieves.

"What a shame!" he said. "A horse is like a brother to the peasant. And you robbed him of it? It is a great sin, I tell you. If you go in for stealing horses, steal them from the landowners. They are worse than

dogs, and deserve anything."

The talk went on, and the peasants from Podolsk told him that it required a great deal of cunning to steal a horse on an estate.

"You must know all the ins and outs of the place, and must have somebody on the spot to help you."

Then it occurred to Ivan Mironov that he knew a landowner--Sventizky; he had worked on his estate, and Sventizky, when paying him off, had deducted one rouble and a half for a broken tool. He remembered well the grey horses which he used to drive at Sventizky's.

Ivan Mironov called on Peter Nikolaevich pretending to ask for employment, but really in order to get the information he wanted. He took precautions to make sure that the watchman was absent, and that the horses were standing in their boxes in the stable. He brought the thieves to the place, and helped them to carry off the three horses.

They divided their gains, and Ivan Mironov returned to his wife with five roubles in his pocket. He had nothing to do at home, having no horse to work in the field, and therefore continued to steal horses in company with professional horse-thieves and gipsies.

PETER NIKOLAEVICH SVENTIZKY did his best to discover who had stolen his horses. He knew somebody on the estate must have helped the thieves, and began to suspect all his staff. He inquired who had slept out that night, and the gang of the working men told him Proshka had not been in the whole night. Proshka, or Prokofy Nikolaevich, was a young fellow who had just finished his military service, handsome, and skilful in all he did; Peter Nikolaevich employed him at times as coachman. The district constable was a friend of Peter Nikolaevich, as were the provincial head of the police, the marshal of the nobility, and also the rural councillor and the examining magistrate. They all came to his house on his saint's day, drinking the cherry brandy he offered them with pleasure, and eating the nice preserved mushrooms of all kinds to accompany the liqueurs. They all sympathised with him in his trouble and tried to help him.

"You always used to take the side of the peasants," said the district constable, "and there you are! I was right in saying they are worse than wild beasts. Flogging is the only way to keep them in order. Well, you say it is all Proshka's doings. Is it not he who was your coachman sometimes?"

"Yes, that is he."

"Will you kindly call him?"

Proshka was summoned before the constable, who began to examine him.

"Where were you that night?"

Proshka pushed back his hair, and his eyes sparkled.

"At home."

"How so? All the men say you were not in."

"Just as you please, your honour."

"My pleasure has nothing to do with the matter. Tell me where you were that night."

"At home."

"Very well. Policeman, bring him to the police-station."

The reason why Proshka did not say where he had been that night was that he had spent it with his sweetheart, Parasha, and had promised not to give her away. He kept his word. No proofs were discovered against him, and he was soon discharged. But Peter Nikolaevich was convinced that Prokofy had been at the bottom of the whole affair, and began to hate him. One day Proshka bought as usual at the merchant's two measures of

oats. One and a half he gave to the horses, and half a measure he gave back to the merchant; the money for it he spent in drink. Peter Nikolaevich found it out, and charged Prokofy with cheating. The judge sentenced the man to three months' imprisonment.

Prokofy had a rather proud nature, and thought himself superior to others. Prison was a great humiliation for him. He came out of it very depressed; there was nothing more to be proud of in life. And more than that, he felt extremely bitter, not only against Peter Nikolaevich, but against the whole world.

On the whole, as all the people around him noticed, Prokofy became another man after his imprisonment, both careless and lazy; he took to drink, and he was soon caught stealing clothes at some woman's house, and found himself again in prison.

All that Peter Nikolaevich discovered about his grey horses was the hide of one of them, Beauty, which had been found somewhere on the estate. The fact that the thieves had got off scot-free irritated Peter Nikolaevich still more. He was unable now to speak of the peasants or to look at them without anger. And whenever he could he tried to oppress them.

XII

AFTER having got rid of the coupon, Eugene Mihailovich forgot all about it; but his wife, Maria Vassilievna, could not forgive herself for having been taken in, nor yet her husband for his cruel words. And most of all she was furious against the two boys who had so skilfully cheated her. From the day she had accepted the forged coupon as payment, she looked closely at all the schoolboys who came in her way in the streets. One day she met Mahin, but did not recognise him, for on seeing her he made a face which quite changed his features. But when, a fortnight after the incident with the coupon, she met Mitia Smokovnikov face to face, she knew him at once.

She let him pass her, then turned back and followed him, and arriving at his house she made inquiries as to whose son he was. The next day she went to the school and met the divinity instructor, the priest Michael Vedensky, in the hall. He asked her what she wanted. She answered that she wished to see the head of the school. "He is not quite well," said the priest. "Can I be of any use to you, or give him your message?"

Maria Vassilievna thought that she might as well tell the priest what was the matter. Michael Vedensky was a widower, and a very ambitious man. A year ago he had met Mitia Smokovnikov's father in society, and had had a discussion with him on religion. Smokovnikov had beaten him decisively on all points; indeed, he had made him appear quite ridiculous. Since that time the priest had decided to pay special

attention to Smokovnikov's son; and, finding him as indifferent to religious matters as his father was, he began to persecute him, and even brought about his failure in examinations.

When Maria Vassilievna told him what young Smokovnikov had done to her, Vedensky could not help feeling an inner satisfaction. He saw in the boy's conduct a proof of the utter wickedness of those who are not guided by the rules of the Church. He decided to take advantage of this great opportunity of warning unbelievers of the perils that threatened them. At all events, he wanted to persuade himself that this was the only motive that guided him in the course he had resolved to take. But at the bottom of his heart he was only anxious to get his revenge on the proud atheist.

"Yes, it is very sad indeed," said Father Michael, toying with the cross he was wearing over his priestly robes, and passing his hands over its polished sides. "I am very glad you have given me your confidence. As a servant of the Church I shall admonish the young man--of course with the utmost kindness. I shall certainly do it in the way that befits my holy office," said Father Michael to himself, really thinking that he had forgotten the ill-feeling the boy's father had towards him. He firmly believed the boy's soul to be the only object of his pious care.

The next day, during the divinity lesson which Father Michael was giving to Mitia Smokovnikov's class, he narrated the incident of the forged coupon, adding that the culprit had been one of the pupils of the

school. "It was a very wicked thing to do," he said; "but to deny the crime is still worse. If it is true that the sin has been committed by one of you, let the guilty one confess." In saying this, Father Michael looked sharply at Mitia Smokovnikov. All the boys, following his glance, turned also to Mitia, who blushed, and felt extremely ill at ease, with large beads of perspiration on his face. Finally, he burst into tears, and ran out of the classroom. His mother, noticing his trouble, found out the truth, ran at once to the photographer's shop, paid over the twelve roubles and fifty kopeks to Maria Vassilievna, and made her promise to deny the boy's guilt. She further implored Mitia to hide the truth from everybody, and in any case to withhold it from his father.

Accordingly, when Fedor Mihailovich had heard of the incident in the divinity class, and his son, questioned by him, had denied all accusations, he called at once on the head of the school, told him what had happened, expressed his indignation at Father Michael's conduct, and said he would not let matters remain as they were.

Father Michael was sent for, and immediately fell into a hot dispute with Smokovnikov.

"A stupid woman first falsely accused my son, then retracts her accusation, and you of course could not hit on anything more sensible to do than to slander an honest and truthful boy!"

"I did not slander him, and I must beg you not to address me in such a

way. You forget what is due to my cloth."

"Your cloth is of no consequence to me."

"Your perversity in matters of religion is known to everybody in the town!" replied Father Michael; and he was so transported with anger that his long thin head quivered.

"Gentlemen! Father Michael!" exclaimed the director of the school, trying to appease their wrath. But they did not listen to him.

"It is my duty as a priest to look after the religious and moral education of our pupils."

"Oh, cease your pretence to be religious! Oh, stop all this humbug of religion! As if I did not know that you believe neither in God nor Devil."

"I consider it beneath my dignity to talk to a man like you," said Father Michael, very much hurt by Smokovnikov's last words, the more so because he knew they were true.

Michael Vedensky carried on his studies in the academy for priests, and that is why, for a long time past, he ceased to believe in what he confessed to be his creed and in what he preached from the pulpit; he only knew that men ought to force themselves to believe in what he tried

to make himself believe.

Smokovnikov was not shocked by Father Michael's conduct; he only thought it illustrative of the influence the Church was beginning to exercise on society, and he told all his friends how his son had been insulted by the priest.

Seeing not only young minds, but also the elder generation, contaminated by atheistic tendencies, Father Michael became more and more convinced of the necessity of fighting those tendencies. The more he condemned the unbelief of Smokovnikov, and those like him, the more confident he grew in the firmness of his own faith, and the less he felt the need of making sure of it, or of bringing his life into harmony with it. His faith, acknowledged as such by all the world around him, became Father Michael's very best weapon with which to fight those who denied it.

The thoughts aroused in him by his conflict with Smokovnikov, together with the annoyance of being blamed by his chiefs in the school, made him carry out the purpose he had entertained ever since his wife's death--of taking monastic orders, and of following the course carried out by some of his fellow-pupils in the academy. One of them was already a bishop, another an archimandrite and on the way to become a bishop.

At the end of the term Michael Vedensky gave up his post in the school, took orders under the name of Missael, and very soon got a post as rector in a seminary in a town on the river Volga.

XIII

MEANWHILE the yard-porter Vassily was marching on the open road down to the south.

He walked in daytime, and when night came some policeman would get him shelter in a peasant's cottage. He was given bread everywhere, and sometimes he was asked to sit down to the evening meal. In a village in the Orel district, where he had stayed for the night, he heard that a merchant who had hired the landowner's orchard for the season, was looking out for strong and able men to serve as watchmen for the fruit-crops. Vassily was tired of tramping, and as he had also no desire whatever to go back to his native village, he went to the man who owned the orchard, and got engaged as watchman for five roubles a month.

Vassily found it very agreeable to live in his orchard shed, and all the more so when the apples and pears began to grow ripe, and when the men from the barn supplied him every day with large bundles of fresh straw from the threshing machine. He used to lie the whole day long on the fragrant straw, with fresh, delicately smelling apples in heaps at his side, looking out in every direction to prevent the village boys from stealing fruit; and he used to whistle and sing meanwhile, to amuse himself. He knew no end of songs, and had a fine voice. When peasant women and young girls came to ask for apples, and to have a chat with him, Vassily gave them larger or smaller apples according as he liked their looks, and received eggs or money in return. The rest of the time

he had nothing to do, but to lie on his back and get up for his meals in the kitchen. He had only one shirt left, one of pink cotton, and that was in holes. But he was strongly built and enjoyed excellent health. When the kettle with black gruel was taken from the stove and served to the working men, Vassily used to eat enough for three, and filled the old watchman on the estate with unceasing wonder. At nights Vassily never slept. He whistled or shouted from time to time to keep off thieves, and his piercing, cat-like eyes saw clearly in the darkness.

One night a company of young lads from the village made their way stealthily to the orchard to shake down apples from the trees. Vassily, coming noiselessly from behind, attacked them; they tried to escape, but he took one of them prisoner to his master.

Vassily's first shed stood at the farthest end of the orchard, but after the pears had been picked he had to remove to another shed only forty paces away from the house of his master. He liked this new place very much. The whole day long he could see the young ladies and gentlemen enjoying themselves; going out for drives in the evenings and quite late at nights, playing the piano or the violin, and singing and dancing. He saw the ladies sitting with the young students on the window sills, engaged in animated conversation, and then going in pairs to walk the dark avenue of lime trees, lit up only by streaks of moonlight. He saw the servants running about with food and drink, he saw the cooks, the stewards, the laundresses, the gardeners, the coachmen, hard at work to supply their masters with food and drink and constant amusement.

Sometimes the young people from the master's house came to the shed, and Vassily offered them the choicest apples, juicy and red. The young ladies used to take large bites out of the apples on the spot, praising their taste, and spoke French to one another--Vassily quite understood it was all about him--and asked Vassily to sing for them.

Vassily felt the greatest admiration for his master's mode of living, which reminded him of what he had seen in Moscow; and he became more and more convinced that the only thing that mattered in life was money. He thought and thought how to get hold of a large sum of money. He remembered his former ways of making small profits whenever he could, and came to the conclusion that that was altogether wrong. Occasional stealing is of no use, he thought. He must arrange a well-prepared plan, and after getting all the information he wanted, carry out his purpose so as to avoid detection.

After the feast of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the last crop of autumn apples was gathered; the master was content with the results, paid off Vassily, and gave him an extra sum as reward for his faithful service.

Vassily put on his new jacket, and a new hat--both were presents from his master's son--but did not make his way homewards. He hated the very thought of the vulgar peasants' life. He went back to Moscow in company of some drunken soldiers, who had been watchmen in the orchard together with him. On his arrival there he at once resolved, under cover of

night, to break into the shop where he had been employed, and beaten, and then turned out by the proprietor without being paid. He knew the place well, and knew where the money was locked up. So he bade the soldiers, who helped him, keep watch outside, and forcing the courtyard door entered the shop and took all the money he could lay his hands on. All this was done very cleverly, and no trace was left of the burglary. The money Vassily had found in the shop amounted to 370 roubles. He gave a hundred roubles to his assistants, and with the rest left for another town where he gave way to dissipation in company of friends of both sexes. The police traced his movements, and when at last he was arrested and put into prison he had hardly anything left out of the money which he had stolen.

XIV

IVAN MIRONOV had become a very clever, fearless and successful horse-thief. Afimia, his wife, who at first used to abuse him for his evil ways, as she called it, was now quite content and felt proud of her husband, who possessed a new sheepskin coat, while she also had a warm jacket and a new fur cloak.

In the village and throughout the whole district every one knew quite well that Ivan Mironov was at the bottom of all the horse-stealing; but nobody would give him away, being afraid of the consequences. Whenever suspicion fell on him, he managed to clear his character. Once during the night he stole horses from the pasture ground in the village Kolotovka. He generally preferred to steal horses from landowners or tradespeople. But this was a harder job, and when he had no chance of success he did not mind robbing peasants too. In Kolotovka he drove off the horses without making sure whose they were. He did not go himself to the spot, but sent a young and clever fellow, Gerassim, to do the stealing for him. The peasants only got to know of the theft at dawn; they rushed in all directions to hunt for the robbers. The horses, meanwhile, were hidden in a ravine in the forest lands belonging to the state.

Ivan Mironov intended to leave them there till the following night, and then to transport them with the utmost haste a hundred miles away to a man he knew. He visited Gerassim in the forest, to see how he was

getting on, brought him a pie and some vodka, and was returning home by a side track in the forest where he hoped to meet nobody. But by ill-luck, he chanced on the keeper of the forest, a retired soldier.

"I say! Have you been looking for mushrooms?" asked the soldier.

"There were none to be found," answered Ivan Mironov, showing the basket of lime bark he had taken with him in case he might want it.

"Yes, mushrooms are scarce this summer," said the soldier. He stood still for a moment, pondered, and then went his way. He clearly saw that something was wrong. Ivan Mironov had no business whatever to take early morning walks in that forest. The soldier went back after a while and looked round. Suddenly he heard the snorting of horses in the ravine. He made his way cautiously to the place whence the sounds came. The grass in the ravine was trodden down, and the marks of horses' hoofs were clearly to be seen. A little further he saw Gerassim, who was sitting and eating his meal, and the horses tied to a tree.

The soldier ran to the village and brought back the bailiff, a police officer, and two witnesses. They surrounded on three sides the spot where Gerassim was sitting and seized the man. He did not deny anything; but, being drunk, told them at once how Ivan Mironov had given him plenty of drink, and induced him to steal the horses; he also said that Ivan Mironov had promised to come that night in order to take the horses away. The peasants left the horses and Gerassim in the ravine, and

hiding behind the trees prepared to lie in ambush for Ivan Mironov. When it grew dark, they heard a whistle. Gerassim answered it with a similar sound. The moment Ivan Mironov descended the slope, the peasants surrounded him and brought him back to the village. The next morning a crowd assembled in front of the bailiff's cottage. Ivan Mironov was brought out and subjected to a close examination. Stepan Pelageushkine, a tall, stooping man with long arms, an aquiline nose, and a gloomy face was the first to put questions to him. Stepan had terminated his military service, and was of a solitary turn of mind. When he had separated from his father, and started his own home, he had his first experience of losing a horse. After that he worked for two years in the mines, and made money enough to buy two horses. These two had been stolen by Ivan Mironov.

"Tell me where my horses are!" shouted Stepan, pale with fury, alternately looking at the ground and at Ivan Mironov's face.

Ivan Mironov denied his guilt. Then Stepan aimed so violent a blow at his face that he smashed his nose and the blood spurted out.

"Tell the truth, I say, or I'll kill you!"

Ivan Mironov kept silent, trying to avoid the blows by stooping. Stepan hit him twice more with his long arm. Ivan Mironov remained silent, turning his head backwards and forwards.

"Beat him, all of you!" cried the bailiff, and the whole crowd rushed upon Ivan Mironov. He fell without a word to the ground, and then shouted,--"Devils, wild beasts, kill me if that's what you want! I am not afraid of you!"

Stepan seized a stone out of those that had been collected for the purpose, and with a heavy blow smashed Ivan Mironov's head.

IVAN MIRONOV'S murderers were brought to trial, Stepan Pelageushkine among them. He had a heavier charge to answer than the others, all the witnesses having stated that it was he who had smashed Ivan Mironov's head with a stone. Stepan concealed nothing when in court. He contented himself with explaining that, having been robbed of his two last horses, he had informed the police. Now it was comparatively easy at that time to trace the horses with the help of professional thieves among the gipsies. But the police officer would not even permit him, and no search had been ordered.

"Nothing else could be done with such a man. He has ruined us all."

"But why did not the others attack him. It was you alone who broke his head open."

"That is false. We all fell upon him. The village agreed to kill him. I only gave the final stroke. What is the use of inflicting unnecessary sufferings on a man?"

The judges were astonished at Stepan's wonderful coolness in narrating the story of his crime--how the peasants fell upon Ivan Mironov, and how he had given the final stroke. Stepan actually did not see anything particularly revolting in this murder. During his military service he had been ordered on one occasion to shoot a soldier, and, now with

regard to Ivan Mironov, he saw nothing loathsome in it. "A man shot is a dead man--that's all. It was him to-day, it might be me to-morrow," he thought. Stepan was only sentenced to one year's imprisonment, which was a mild punishment for what he had done. His peasant's dress was taken away from him and put in the prison stores, and he had a prison suit and felt boots given to him instead. Stepan had never had much respect for the authorities, but now he became quite convinced that all the chiefs, all the fine folk, all except the Czar--who alone had pity on the peasants and was just--all were robbers who suck blood out of the people. All he heard from the deported convicts, and those sentenced to hard labour, with whom he had made friends in prisons, confirmed him in his views. One man had been sentenced to hard labour for having convicted his superiors of a theft; another for having struck an official who had unjustly confiscated the property of a peasant; a third because he forged bank notes. The well-to-do-people, the merchants, might do whatever they chose and come to no harm; but a poor peasant, for a trumpery reason or for none at all, was sent to prison to become food for vermin.

He had visits from his wife while in prison. Her life without him was miserable enough, when, to make it worse, her cottage was destroyed by fire. She was completely ruined, and had to take to begging with her children. His wife's misery embittered Stepan still more. He got on very badly with all the people in the prison; was rude to every one; and one day he nearly killed the cook with an axe, and therefore got an additional year in prison. In the course of that year he received the

news that his wife was dead, and that he had no longer a home.

When Stepan had finished his time in prison, he was taken to the prison stores, and his own dress was taken down from the shelf and handed to him.

"Where am I to go now?" he asked the prison officer, putting on his old dress.

"Why, home."

"I have no home. I shall have to go on the road. Robbery will not be a pleasant occupation."

"In that case you will soon be back here."

"I am not so sure of that."

And Stepan left the prison. Nevertheless he took the road to his own place. He had nowhere else to turn.

On his way he stopped for a night's rest in an inn that had a public bar attached to it. The inn was kept by a fat man from the town, Vladimir, and he knew Stepan. He knew that Stepan had been put into prison through ill luck, and did not mind giving him shelter for the night. He was a rich man, and had persuaded his neighbour's wife to leave her husband

and come to live with him. She lived in his house as his wife, and helped him in his business as well.

Stepan knew all about the innkeeper's affairs--how he had wronged the peasant, and how the woman who was living with him had left her husband. He saw her now sitting at the table in a rich dress, and looking very hot as she drank her tea. With great condescension she asked Stepan to have tea with her. No other travellers were stopping in the inn that night. Stepan was given a place in the kitchen where he might sleep. Matrena--that was the woman's name--cleared the table and went to her room. Stepan went to lie down on the large stove in the kitchen, but he could not sleep, and the wood splinters put on the stove to dry were crackling under him, as he tossed from side to side. He could not help thinking of his host's fat paunch protruding under the belt of his shirt, which had lost its colour from having been washed ever so many times. Would not it be a good thing to make a good clean incision in that paunch. And that woman, too, he thought.

One moment he would say to himself, "I had better go from here to-morrow, bother them all!" But then again Ivan Mironov came back to his mind, and he went on thinking of the innkeeper's paunch and Matrena's white throat bathed in perspiration. "Kill I must, and it must be both!"

He heard the cock crow for the second time.

"I must do it at once, or dawn will be here." He had seen in the evening before he went to bed a knife and an axe. He crawled down from the stove, took the knife and axe, and went out of the kitchen door. At that very moment he heard the lock of the entrance door open. The innkeeper was going out of the house to the courtyard. It all turned out contrary to what Stepan desired. He had no opportunity of using the knife; he just swung the axe and split the innkeeper's head in two. The man tumbled down on the threshold of the door, then on the ground.

Stepan stepped into the bedroom. Matrena jumped out of bed, and remained standing by its side. With the same axe Stepan killed her also.

Then he lighted the candle, took the money out of the desk, and left the house.

XVI

IN a small district town, some distance away from the other buildings, an old man, a former official, who had taken to drink, lived in his own house with his two daughters and his son-in-law. The married daughter was also addicted to drink and led a bad life, and it was the elder daughter, the widow Maria Semenovna, a wrinkled woman of fifty, who supported the whole family. She had a pension of two hundred and fifty roubles a year, and the family lived on this. Maria Semenovna did all the work in the house, looked after the drunken old father, who was very weak, attended to her sister's child, and managed all the cooking and the washing of the family. And, as is always the case, whatever there was to do, she was expected to do it, and was, moreover, continually scolded by all the three people in the house; her brother-in-law used even to beat her when he was drunk. She bore it all patiently, and as is also always the case, the more work she had to face, the quicker she managed to get through it. She helped the poor, sacrificing her own wants; she gave them her clothes, and was a ministering angel to the sick.

Once the lame, crippled village tailor was working in Maria Semenovna's house. He had to mend her old father's coat, and to mend and repair Maria Semenovna's fur-jacket for her to wear in winter when she went to market.

The lame tailor was a clever man, and a keen observer: he had seen many

different people owing to his profession, and was fond of reflection, condemned as he was to a sedentary life.

Having worked a week at Maria Semenovna's, he wondered greatly about her life. One day she came to the kitchen, where he was sitting with his work, to wash a towel, and began to ask him how he was getting on. He told her of the wrong he had suffered from his brother, and how he now lived on his own allotment of land, separated from that of his brother.

"I thought I should have been better off that way," he said. "But I am now just as poor as before."

"It is much better never to change, but to take life as it comes," said Maria Semenovna. "Take life as it comes," she repeated.

"Why, I wonder at you, Maria Semenovna," said the lame tailor. "You alone do the work, and you are so good to everybody. But they don't repay you in kind, I see."

Maria Semenovna did not utter a word in answer.

"I dare say you have found out in books that we are rewarded in heaven for the good we do here."

"We don't know that. But we must try to do the best we can."

"Is it said so in books?"

"In books as well," she said, and read to him the Sermon on the Mount. The tailor was much impressed. When he had been paid for his job and gone home, he did not cease to think about Maria Semenovna, both what she had said and what she had read to him.

XVII

PETER NIKOLAEVICH SVENTIZKY'S views of the peasantry had now changed for the worse, and the peasants had an equally bad opinion of him. In the course of a single year they felled twenty-seven oaks in his forest, and burnt a barn which had not been insured. Peter Nikolaevich came to the conclusion that there was no getting on with the people around him.

At that very time the landowner, Liventsov, was trying to find a manager for his estate, and the Marshal of the Nobility recommended Peter Nikolaevich as the ablest man in the district in the management of land. The estate owned by Liventsov was an extremely large one, but there was no revenue to be got out of it, as the peasants appropriated all its wealth to their own profit. Peter Nikolaevich undertook to bring everything into order; rented out his own land to somebody else; and settled with his wife on the Liventsov estate, in a distant province on the river Volga.

Peter Nikolaevich was always fond of order, and wanted things to be regulated by law; and now he felt less able of allowing those raw and rude peasants to take possession, quite illegally too, of property that did not belong to them. He was glad of the opportunity of giving them a good lesson, and set seriously to work at once. One peasant was sent to prison for stealing wood; to another he gave a thrashing for not having made way for him on the road with his cart, and for not having lifted his cap to salute him. As to the pasture ground which was a subject of

dispute, and was considered by the peasants as their property, Peter Nikolaevich informed the peasants that any of their cattle grazing on it would be driven away by him.

The spring came and the peasants, just as they had done in previous years, drove their cattle on to the meadows belonging to the landowner. Peter Nikolaevich called some of the men working on the estate and ordered them to drive the cattle into his yard. The peasants were working in the fields, and, disregarding the screaming of the women, Peter Nikolaevich's men succeeded in driving in the cattle. When they came home the peasants went in a crowd to the cattle-yard on the estate, and asked for their cattle. Peter Nikolaevich came out to talk to them with a gun slung on his shoulder; he had just returned from a ride of inspection. He told them that he would not let them have their cattle unless they paid a fine of fifty kopeks for each of the horned cattle, and twenty kopeks for each sheep. The peasants loudly declared that the pasture ground was their property, because their fathers and grandfathers had used it, and protested that he had no right whatever to lay hand on their cattle.

"Give back our cattle, or you will regret it," said an old man coming up to Peter Nikolaevich.

"How shall I regret it?" cried Peter Nikolaevich, turning pale, and coming close to the old man.

"Give them back, you villain, and don't provoke us."

"What?" cried Peter Nikolaevich, and slapped the old man in the face.

"You dare to strike me? Come along, you fellows, let us take back our cattle by force."

The crowd drew close to him. Peter Nikolaevich tried to push his way, through them, but the peasants resisted him. Again he tried force.

His gun, accidentally discharged in the melee, killed one of the peasants. Instantly the fight began. Peter Nikolaevich was trodden down, and five minutes later his mutilated body was dragged into the ravine.

The murderers were tried by martial law, and two of them sentenced to the gallows.

XVIII

IN the village where the lame tailor lived, in the Zemliansk district of the Voronesh province, five rich peasants hired from the landowner a hundred and five acres of rich arable land, black as tar, and let it out on lease to the rest of the peasants at fifteen to eighteen roubles an acre. Not one acre was given under twelve roubles. They got a very profitable return, and the five acres which were left to each of their company practically cost them nothing. One of the five peasants died, and the lame tailor received an offer to take his place.

When they began to divide the land, the tailor gave up drinking vodka, and, being consulted as to how much land was to be divided, and to whom it should be given, he proposed to give allotments to all on equal terms, not taking from the tenants more than was due for each piece of land out of the sum paid to the landowner.

"Why so?"

"We are no heathens, I should think," he said. "It is all very well for the masters to be unfair, but we are true Christians. We must do as God bids. Such is the law of Christ."

"Where have you got that law from?"

"It is in the Book, in the Gospels; just come to me on Sunday, I will

read you a few passages, and we will have a talk afterwards."

They did not all come to him on Sunday, but three came, and he began reading to them.

He read five chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel, and they talked. One man only, Ivan Chouev, accepted the lesson and carried it out completely, following the rule of Christ in everything from that day. His family did the same. Out of the arable land he took only what was his due, and refused to take more.

The lame tailor and Ivan had people calling on them, and some of these people began to grasp the meaning of the Gospels, and in consequence gave up smoking, drinking, swearing, and using bad language and tried to help one another. They also ceased to go to church, and took their ikons to the village priest, saying they did not want them any more. The priest was frightened, and reported what had occurred to the bishop. The bishop was at a loss what to do. At last he resolved to send the archimandrite Missael to the village, the one who had formerly been Mitia Smokovnikov's teacher of religion.

XIX

ASKING Father Missael on his arrival to take a seat, the bishop told him what had happened in his diocese.

"It all comes from weakness of spirit and from ignorance. You are a learned man, and I rely on you. Go to the village, call the parishioners together, and convince them of their error."

"If your Grace bids me go, and you give me your blessing, I will do my best," said Father Missael. He was very pleased with the task entrusted to him. Every opportunity he could find to demonstrate the firmness of his faith was a boon to him. In trying to convince others he was chiefly intent on persuading himself that he was really a firm believer.

"Do your best. I am greatly distressed about my flock," said the bishop, leisurely taking a cup with his white plump hands from the servant who brought in the tea.

"Why is there only one kind of jam? Bring another," he said to the servant. "I am greatly distressed," he went on, turning to Father Missael.

Missael earnestly desired to prove his zeal; but, being a man of small means, he asked to be paid for the expenses of his journey; and being

afraid of the rough people who might be ill-dis-posed towards him, he also asked the bishop to get him an order from the governor of the province, so that the local police might help him in case of need. The bishop complied with his wishes, and Missael got his things ready with the help of his servant and his cook. They furnished him with a case full of wine, and a basket with the victuals he might need in going to such a lonely place. Fully provided with all he wanted, he started for the village to which he was commissioned. He was pleasantly conscious of the importance of his mission. All his doubts as to his own faith passed away, and he was now fully convinced of its reality.

His thoughts, far from being concerned with the real foundation of his creed--this was accepted as an axiom--were occupied with the arguments used against the forms of worship.

XX

THE village priest and his wife received Father Missael with great honours, and the next day after he had arrived the parishioners were invited to assemble in the church. Missael in a new silk cassock, with a large cross on his chest, and his long hair carefully combed, ascended the pulpit; the priest stood at his side, the deacons and the choir at a little distance behind him, and the side entrances were guarded by the police. The dissenters also came in their dirty sheepskin coats.

After the service Missael delivered a sermon, admonishing the dissenters to return to the bosom of their mother, the Church, threatening them with the torments of hell, and promising full forgiveness to those who would repent.

The dissenters kept silent at first. Then, being asked questions, they gave answers. To the question why they dissented, they said that their chief reason was the fact that the Church worshipped gods made of wood, which, far from being ordained, were condemned by the Scriptures.

When asked by Missael whether they actually considered the holy ikons to be mere planks of wood, Chouev answered,--"Just look at the back of any ikon you choose and you will see what they are made of."

When asked why they turned against the priests, their answer was that the Scripture says: "As you have received it without fee, so you must

give it to the others; whereas the priests require payment for the grace they bestow by the sacraments." To all attempts which Missael made to oppose them by arguments founded on Holy Writ, the tailor and Ivan Chouev gave calm but very firm answers, contradicting his assertions by appeal to the Scriptures, which they knew uncommonly well.

Missael got angry and threatened them with persecution by the authorities. Their answer was: It is said, I have been persecuted and so will you be.

The discussion came to nothing, and all would have ended well if Missael had not preached the next day at mass, denouncing the wicked seducers of the faithful and saying that they deserved the worst punishment. Coming out of the church, the crowd of peasants began to consult whether it would not be well to give the infidels a good lesson for disturbing the minds of the community. The same day, just when Missael was enjoying some salmon and gangfish, dining at the village priest's in company with the inspector, a violent brawl arose in the village. The peasants came in a crowd to Chouev's cottage, and waited for the dissenters to come out in order to give them a thrashing.

The dissenters assembled in the cottage numbered about twenty men and women. Missael's sermon and the attitude of the orthodox peasants, together with their threats, aroused in the mind of the dissenters angry feelings, to which they had before been strangers. It was near evening, the women had to go and milk the cows, and the peasants were still

standing and waiting at the door.

A boy who stepped out of the door was beaten and driven back into the house. The people within began consulting what was to be done, and could come to no agreement. The tailor said, "We must bear whatever is done to us, and not resist." Chouev replied that if they decided on that course they would, all of them, be beaten to death. In consequence, he seized a poker and went out of the house. "Come!" he shouted, "let us follow the law of Moses!" And, falling upon the peasants, he knocked out one man's eye, and in the meanwhile all those who had been in his house contrived to get out and make their way home.

Chouev was thrown into prison and charged with sedition and blasphemy.

Two years previous to those events a strong and handsome young girl of an eastern type, Katia Turchaninova, came from the Don military settlements to St. Petersburg to study in the university college for women. In that town she met a student, Turin, the son of a district governor in the Simbirsk province, and fell in love with him. But her love was not of the ordinary type, and she had no desire to become his wife and the mother of his children. He was a dear comrade to her, and their chief bond of union was a feeling of revolt they had in common, as well as the hatred they bore, not only to the existing forms of government, but to all those who represented that government. They had also in common the sense that they both excelled their enemies in culture, in brains, as well as in morals. Katia Turchaninova was a gifted girl, possessed of a good memory, by means of which she easily mastered the lectures she attended. She was successful in her examinations, and, apart from that, read all the newest books. She was certain that her vocation was not to bear and rear children, and even looked on such a task with disgust and contempt. She thought herself chosen by destiny to destroy the present government, which was fettering the best abilities of the nation, and to reveal to the people a higher standard of life, inculcated by the latest writers of other countries. She was handsome, a little inclined to stoutness: she had a good complexion, shining black eyes, abundant black hair. She inspired the men she knew with feelings she neither wished nor had time to share, busy as she was with propaganda work, which consisted chiefly in mere

talking. She was not displeased, however, to inspire these feelings; and, without dressing too smartly, did not neglect her appearance. She liked to be admired, as it gave her opportunities of showing how little she prized what was valued so highly by other women.

In her views concerning the method of fighting the government she went further than the majority of her comrades, and than her friend Turin; all means, she taught, were justified in such a struggle, not excluding murder. And yet, with all her revolutionary ideas, Katia Turchaninova was in her soul a very kind girl, ready to sacrifice herself for the welfare and the happiness of other people, and sincerely pleased when she could do a kindness to anybody, a child, an old person, or an animal.

She went in the summer to stay with a friend, a schoolmistress in a small town on the river Volga. Turin lived near that town, on his father's estate. He often came to see the two girls; they gave each other books to read, and had long discussions, expressing their common indignation with the state of affairs in the country. The district doctor, a friend of theirs, used also to join them on many occasions.

The estate of the Turins was situated in the neighbourhood of the Liventsov estate, the one that was entrusted to the management of Peter Nikolaevich Sventizky. Soon after Peter Nikolaevich had settled there, and begun to enforce order, young Turin, having observed an independent tendency in the peasants on the Liventsov estate, as well as their

determination to uphold their rights, became interested in them. He came often to the village to talk with the men, and developed his socialistic theories, insisting particularly on the nationalisation of the land.

After Peter Nikolaevich had been murdered, and the murderers sent to trial, the revolutionary group of the small town boiled over with indignation, and did not shrink from openly expressing it. The fact of Turin's visits to the village and his propaganda work among the students, became known to the authorities during the trial. A search was made in his house; and, as the police found a few revolutionary leaflets among his effects, he was arrested and transferred to prison in St. Petersburg.

Katia Turchaninova followed him to the metropolis, and went to visit him in prison. She was not admitted on the day she came, and was told to come on the day fixed by regulations for visits to the prisoners. When that day arrived, and she was finally allowed to see him, she had to talk to him through two gratings separating the prisoner from his visitor. This visit increased her indignation against the authorities. And her feelings become all the more revolutionary after a visit she paid to the office of a gendarme officer who had to deal with the Turin case. The officer, a handsome man, seemed obviously disposed to grant her exceptional favours in visiting the prisoner, if she would allow him to make love to her. Disgusted with him, she appealed to the chief of police. He pretended--just as the officer did when talking officially to her--to be powerless himself, and to depend entirely on orders coming

from the minister of state. She sent a petition to the minister asking for an interview, which was refused.

Then she resolved to do a desperate thing and bought a revolver.

XXII

THE minister was receiving petitioners at the usual hour appointed for the reception. He had talked successively to three of them, and now a pretty young woman with black eyes, who was holding a petition in her left hand, approached. The minister's eyes gleamed when he saw how attractive the petitioner was, but recollecting his high position he put on a serious face.

"What do you want?" he asked, coming down to where she stood. Without answering his question the young woman quickly drew a revolver from under her cloak and aiming it at the minister's chest fired--but missed him.

The minister rushed at her, trying to seize her hand, but she escaped, and taking a step back, fired a second time. The minister ran out of the room. The woman was immediately seized. She was trembling violently, and could not utter a single word; after a while she suddenly burst into a hysterical laugh. The minister was not even wounded.

That woman was Katia Turchaninova. She was put into the prison of preliminary detention. The minister received congratulations and marks of sympathy from the highest quarters, and even from the emperor himself, who appointed a commission to investigate the plot that had led to the attempted assassination. As a matter of fact there was no plot whatever, but the police officials and the detectives set to work

with the utmost zeal to discover all the threads of the non-existing conspiracy. They did everything to deserve the fees they were paid; they got up in the small hours of the morning, searched one house after another, took copies of papers and of books they found, read diaries, personal letters, made extracts from them on the very best notepaper and in beautiful handwriting, interrogated Katia Turchaninova ever so many times, and confronted her with all those whom they suspected of conspiracy, in order to extort from her the names of her accomplices.

The minister, a good-natured man at heart, was sincerely sorry for the pretty girl. But he said to himself that he was bound to consider his high state duties imposed upon him, even though they did not imply much work and trouble. So, when his former colleague, a chamberlain and a friend of the Turins, met him at a court ball and tried to rouse his pity for Turin and the girl Turchaninova, he shrugged his shoulders, stretching the red ribbon on his white waistcoat, and said: "Je ne demanderais pas mieux que de relacher cette pauvre fillette, mais vous savez le devoir." And in the meantime Katia Turchaninova was kept in prison. She was at times in a quiet mood, communicated with her fellow-prisoners by knocking on the walls, and read the books that were sent to her. But then came days when she had fits of desperate fury, knocking with her fists against the wall, screaming and laughing like a mad-woman.

XXIII

ONE day Maria Semenovna came home from the treasurer's office, where she had received her pension. On her way she met a schoolmaster, a friend of hers.

"Good day, Maria Semenovna! Have you received your money?" the schoolmaster asked, in a loud voice from the other side of the street.

"I have," answered Maria Semenovna. "But it was not much; just enough to fill the holes."

"Oh, there must be some tidy pickings out of such a lot of money," said the schoolmaster, and passed on, after having said good-bye.

"Good-bye," said Maria Semenovna. While she was looking at her friend, she met a tall man face to face, who had very long arms and a stern look in his eyes. Coming to her house, she was very startled on again seeing the same man with the long arms, who had evidently followed her. He remained standing another moment after she had gone in, then turned and walked away.

Maria Semenovna felt somewhat frightened at first. But when she had entered the house, and had given her father and her nephew Fedia the presents she had brought for them, and she had patted the dog Treasure, who whined with joy, she forgot her fears. She gave the money to her

father and began to work, as there was always plenty for her to do.

The man she met face to face was Stepan.

After he had killed the innkeeper, he did not return to town. Strange to say, he was not sorry to have committed that murder. His mind went back to the murdered man over and over again during the following day; and he liked the recollection of having done the thing so skilfully, so cleverly, that nobody-would ever discover it, and he would not therefore be prevented from murdering other people in the same way. Sitting in the public-house and having his tea, he looked at the people around him with the same thought how he should murder them. In the evening he called at a carter's, a man from his village, to spend the night at his house. The carter was not in. He said he would wait for him, and in the meanwhile began talking to the carter's wife. But when she moved to the stove, with her back turned to him, the idea entered his mind to kill her. He marvelled at himself at first, and shook his head; but the next moment he seized the knife he had hidden in his boot, knocked the woman down on the floor, and cut her throat. When the children began to scream, he killed them also and went away. He did not look out for another place to spend the night, but at once left the town. In a village some distance away he went to the inn and slept there. The next day he returned to the district town, and there he overheard in the street Maria Semenovna's talk with the schoolmaster. Her look frightened him, but yet he made up his mind to creep into her house, and rob her of the money she had received. When the night came he broke the lock and entered the house.

The first person who heard his steps was the younger daughter, the married one. She screamed. Stepan stabbed her immediately with his knife. Her husband woke up and fell upon Stepan, seized him by his throat, and struggled with him desperately. But Stepan was the stronger man and overpowered him. After murdering him, Stepan, excited by the long fight, stepped into the next room behind a partition. That was Maria Semenovna's bedroom. She rose in her bed, looked at Stepan with her mild frightened eyes, and crossed herself.

Once more her look scared Stepan. He dropped his eyes.

"Where is your money?" he asked, without raising his face.

She did not answer.

"Where is the money?" asked Stepan again, showing her his knife.

"How can you . . ." she said.

"You will see how."

Stepan came close to her, in order to seize her hands and prevent her struggling with him, but she did not even try to lift her arms or offer any resistance; she pressed her hands to her chest, and sighed heavily.

"Oh, what a great sin!" she cried. "How can you! Have mercy on yourself."

To destroy somebody's soul . . . and worse, your own! . . ."

Stepan could not stand her voice any longer, and drew his knife sharply across her throat. "Stop that talk!" he said. She fell back with a hoarse cry, and the pillow was stained with blood. He turned away, and went round the rooms in order to collect all he thought worth taking. Having made a bundle of the most valuable things, he lighted a cigarette, sat down for a while, brushed his clothes, and left the house. He thought this murder would not matter to him more than those he had committed before; but before he got a night's lodging, he felt suddenly so exhausted that he could not walk any farther. He stepped down into the gutter and remained lying there the rest of the night, and the next day and the next night.

PART SECOND

I

THE whole time he was lying in the gutter Stepan saw continually before his eyes the thin, kindly, and frightened face of Maria Semenovna, and seemed to hear her voice. "How can you?" she went on saying in his imagination, with her peculiar lisping voice. Stepan saw over again and over again before him all he had done to her. In horror he shut his eyes, and shook his hairy head, to drive away these thoughts and recollections. For a moment he would get rid of them, but in their place horrid black faces with red eyes appeared and frightened him continuously. They grinned at him, and kept repeating, "Now you have done away with her you must do away with yourself, or we will not leave you alone." He opened his eyes, and again he saw HER and heard her voice; and felt an immense pity for her and a deep horror and disgust with himself. Once more he shut his eyes, and the black faces reappeared. Towards the evening of the next day he rose and went, with hardly any strength left, to a public-house. There he ordered a drink, and repeated his demands over and over again, but no quantity of liquor could make him intoxicated. He was sitting at a table, and swallowed silently one glass after another.

A police officer came in. "Who are you?" he asked Stepan.

"I am the man who murdered all the Dobrotvorov people last night," he answered.

He was arrested, bound with ropes, and brought to the nearest police-station; the next day he was transferred to the prison in the town. The inspector of the prison recognised him as an old inmate, and a very turbulent one; and, hearing that he had now become a real criminal, accosted him very harshly.

"You had better be quiet here," he said in a hoarse voice, frowning, and protruding his lower jaw. "The moment you don't behave, I'll flog you to death! Don't try to escape--I will see to that!"

"I have no desire to escape," said Stepan, dropping his eyes. "I surrendered of my own free will."

"Shut up! You must look straight into your superior's eyes when you talk to him," cried the inspector, and struck Stepan with his fist under the jaw.

At that moment Stepan again saw the murdered woman before him, and heard her voice; he did not pay attention, therefore, to the inspector's words.

"What?" he asked, coming to his senses when he felt the blow on his face.

"Be off! Don't pretend you don't hear."

The inspector expected Stepan to be violent, to talk to the other prisoners, to make attempts to escape from prison. But nothing of the kind ever happened. Whenever the guard or the inspector himself looked into his cell through the hole in the door, they saw Stepan sitting on a bag filled with straw, holding his head with his hands and whispering to himself. On being brought before the examining magistrate charged with the inquiry into his case, he did not behave like an ordinary convict. He was very absent-minded, hardly listening to the questions; but when he heard what was asked, he answered truthfully, causing the utmost perplexity to the magistrate, who, accustomed as he was to the necessity of being very clever and very cunning with convicts, felt a strange sensation just as if he were lifting up his foot to ascend a step and found none. Stepan told him the story of all his murders; and did it frowning, with a set look, in a quiet, businesslike voice, trying to recollect all the circumstances of his crimes. "He stepped out of the house," said Stepan, telling the tale of his first murder, "and stood barefooted at the door; I hit him, and he just groaned; I went to his wife, . . ." And so on.

One day the magistrate, visiting the prison cells, asked Stepan whether there was anything he had to complain of, or whether he had any wishes that might be granted him. Stepan said he had no wishes whatever, and had nothing to complain of the way he was treated in prison. The

magistrate, on leaving him, took a few steps in the foul passage, then stopped and asked the governor who had accompanied him in his visit how this prisoner was behaving.

"I simply wonder at him," said the governor, who was very pleased with Stepan, and spoke kindly of him. "He has now been with us about two months, and could be held up as a model of good behaviour. But I am afraid he is plotting some mischief. He is a daring man, and exceptionally strong."

II

DURING the first month in prison Stepan suffered from the same agonising vision. He saw the grey wall of his cell, he heard the sounds of the prison; the noise of the cell below him, where a number of convicts were confined together; the striking of the prison clock; the steps of the sentry in the passage; but at the same time he saw HER with that kindly face which conquered his heart the very first time he met her in the street, with that thin, strongly-marked neck, and he heard her soft, lisping, pathetic voice: "To destroy somebody's soul . . . and, worst of all, your own. . . . How can you? . . ."

After a while her voice would die away, and then black faces would appear. They would appear whether he had his eyes open or shut. With his closed eyes he saw them more distinctly. When he opened his eyes they vanished for a moment, melting away into the walls and the door; but after a while they reappeared and surrounded him from three sides, grinning at him and saying over and over: "Make an end! Make an end! Hang yourself! Set yourself on fire!" Stepan shook all over when he heard that, and tried to say all the prayers he knew: "Our Lady" or "Our Father." At first this seemed to help. In saying his prayers he began to recollect his whole life; his father, his mother, the village, the dog "Wolf," the old grandfather lying on the stove, the bench on which the children used to play; then the girls in the village with their songs, his horses and how they had been stolen, and how the thief was caught and how he killed him with a stone. He recollected also the first prison

he was in and his leaving it, and the fat innkeeper, the carter's wife and the children. Then again SHE came to his mind and again he was terrified. Throwing his prison overcoat off his shoulders, he jumped out of bed, and, like a wild animal in a cage, began pacing up and down his tiny cell, hastily turning round when he had reached the damp walls. Once more he tried to pray, but it was of no use now.

The autumn came with its long nights. One evening when the wind whistled and howled in the pipes, Stepan, after he had paced up and down his cell for a long time, sat down on his bed. He felt he could not struggle any more; the black demons had overpowered him, and he had to submit. For some time he had been looking at the funnel of the oven. If he could fix on the knob of its lid a loop made of thin shreds of narrow linen straps it would hold. . . . But he would have to manage it very cleverly. He set to work, and spent two days in making straps out of the linen bag on which he slept. When the guard came into the cell he covered the bed with his overcoat. He tied the straps with big knots and made them double, in order that they might be strong enough to hold his weight. During these preparations he was free from tormenting visions. When the straps were ready he made a slip-knot out of them, and put it round his neck, stood up in his bed, and hanged himself. But at the very moment that his tongue began to protrude the straps got loose, and he fell down. The guard rushed in at the noise. The doctor was called in, Stepan was brought to the infirmary. The next day he recovered, and was removed from the infirmary, no more to solitary confinement, but to share the common cell with other prisoners.

In the common cell he lived in the company of twenty men, but felt as if he were quite alone. He did not notice the presence of the rest; did not speak to anybody, and was tormented by the old agony. He felt it most of all when the men were sleeping and he alone could not get one moment of sleep. Continually he saw HER before his eyes, heard her voice, and then again the black devils with their horrible eyes came and tortured him in the usual way.

He again tried to say his prayers, but, just as before, it did not help him. One day when, after his prayers, she was again before his eyes, he began to implore her dear soul to forgive him his sin, and release him. Towards morning, when he fell down quite exhausted on his crushed linen bag, he fell asleep at once, and in his dream she came to him with her thin, wrinkled, and severed neck. "Will you forgive me?" he asked. She looked at him with her mild eyes and did not answer. "Will you forgive me?" And so he asked her three times. But she did not say a word, and he awoke. From that time onwards he suffered less, and seemed to come to his senses, looked around him, and began for the first time to talk to the other men in the cell.

III

STEPAN'S cell was shared among others by the former yard-porter, Vassily, who had been sentenced to deportation for robbery, and by Chouev, sentenced also to deportation. Vassily sang songs the whole day long with his fine voice, or told his adventures to the other men in the cell. Chouev was working at something all day, mending his clothes, or reading the Gospel and the Psalter.

Stepan asked him why he was put into prison, and Chouev answered that he was being persecuted because of his true Christian faith by the priests, who were all of them hypocrites and hated those who followed the law of Christ. Stepan asked what that true law was, and Chouev made clear to him that the true law consists in not worshipping gods made with hands, but worshipping the spirit and the truth. He told him how he had learnt the truth from the lame tailor at the time when they were dividing the land.

"And what will become of those who have done evil?" asked Stepan.

"The Scriptures give an answer to that," said Chouev, and read aloud to him Matthew xxv. 31:--"When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth His sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats

on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

Vassily, who was sitting on the floor at Chouev's side, and was listening to his reading the Gospel, nodded his handsome head in approval. "True," he said in a resolute tone. "Go, you cursed villains,

into everlasting punishment, since you did not give food to the hungry, but swallowed it all yourself. Serves them right! I have read the holy Nikodim's writings," he added, showing off his erudition.

"And will they never be pardoned?" asked Stepan, who had listened silently, with his hairy head bent low down.

"Wait a moment, and be silent," said Chouev to Vassily, who went on talking about the rich who had not given meat to the stranger, nor visited him in the prison.

"Wait, I say!" said Chouev, again turning over the leaves of the Gospel. Having found what he was looking for, Chouev smoothed the page with his large and strong hand, which had become exceedingly white in prison:

"And there were also two other malefactors, led with Him"--it means with Christ--"to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus,--'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying,--'He saved others; let Him save Himself if He be Christ, the chosen of God.' And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar, and saying, 'If Thou be the King of the Jews save Thyself.' And a superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, 'This is the King of the Jews.' And one of the malefactors

which were hanged railed on Him, saying, 'If thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.' But the other answering rebuked Him, saying, 'Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.' And he said unto Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.' And Jesus said unto him, 'Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.'"

Stepan did not say anything, and was sitting in thought, as if he were listening.

Now he knew what the true faith was. Those only will be saved who have given food and drink to the poor and visited the prisoners; those who have not done it, go to hell. And yet the malefactor had repented on the cross, and went nevertheless to paradise. This did not strike him as being inconsistent. Quite the contrary. The one confirmed the other: the fact that the merciful will go to Heaven, and the unmerciful to hell, meant that everybody ought to be merciful, and the malefactor having been forgiven by Christ meant that Christ was merciful. This was all new to Stepan, and he wondered why it had been hidden from him so long.

From that day onward he spent all his free time with Chouev, asking him questions and listening to him. He saw but a single truth at the bottom of the teaching of Christ as revealed to him by Chouev: that all men are brethren, and that they ought to love and pity one another in order that all might be happy. And when he listened to Chouev, everything that was

consistent with this fundamental truth came to him like a thing he had known before and only forgotten since, while whatever he heard that seemed to contradict it, he would take no notice of, as he thought that he simply had not understood the real meaning. And from that time Stepan was a different man.

IV

STEPAN had been very submissive and meek ever since he came to the prison, but now he made the prison authorities and all his fellow-prisoners wonder at the change in him. Without being ordered, and out of his proper turn he would do all the very hardest work in prison, and the dirtiest too. But in spite of his humility, the other prisoners stood in awe of him, and were afraid of him, as they knew he was a resolute man, possessed of great physical strength. Their respect for him increased after the incident of the two tramps who fell upon him; he wrenched himself loose from them and broke the arm of one of them in the fight. These tramps had gambled with a young prisoner of some means and deprived him of all his money. Stepan took his part, and deprived the tramps of their winnings. The tramps poured their abuse on him; but when they attacked him, he got the better of them. When the Governor asked how the fight had come about, the tramps declared that it was Stepan who had begun it. Stepan did not try to exculpate himself, and bore patiently his sentence which was three days in the punishment-cell, and after that solitary confinement.

In his solitary cell he suffered because he could no longer listen to Chouev and his Gospel. He was also afraid that the former visions of HER and of the black devils would reappear to torment him. But the visions were gone for good. His soul was full of new and happy ideas. He felt glad to be alone if only he could read, and if he had the Gospel. He knew that he might have got hold of the Gospel, but he could not read.

He had started to learn the alphabet in his boyhood, but could not grasp the joining of the syllables, and remained illiterate. He made up his mind to start reading anew, and asked the guard to bring him the Gospels. They were brought to him, and he sat down to work. He contrived to recollect the letters, but could not join them into syllables. He tried as hard as he could to understand how the letters ought to be put together to form words, but with no result whatever. He lost his sleep, had no desire to eat, and a deep sadness came over him, which he was unable to shake off.

"Well, have you not yet mastered it?" asked the guard one day.

"No."

"Do you know 'Our Father'?"

"I do."

"Since you do, read it in the Gospels. Here it is," said the guard, showing him the prayer in the Gospels. Stepan began to read it, comparing the letters he knew with the familiar sounds.

And all of a sudden the mystery of the syllables was revealed to him, and he began to read. This was a great joy. From that moment he could read, and the meaning of the words, spelt out with such great pains,

became more significant.

Stepan did not mind any more being alone. He was so full of his work that he did not feel glad when he was transferred back to the common cell, his private cell being needed for a political prisoner who had been just sent to prison.

IN the meantime Mahin, the schoolboy who had taught his friend Smokovnikov to forge the coupon, had finished his career at school and then at the university, where he had studied law. He had the advantage of being liked by women, and as he had won favour with a vice-minister's former mistress, he was appointed when still young as examining magistrate. He was dishonest, had debts, had gambled, and had seduced many women; but he was clever, sagacious, and a good magistrate. He was appointed to the court of the district where Stepan Pelageushkine had been tried. When Stepan was brought to him the first time to give evidence, his sincere and quiet answers puzzled the magistrate. He somehow unconsciously felt that this man, brought to him in fetters and with a shorn head, guarded by two soldiers who were waiting to take him back to prison, had a free soul and was immeasurably superior to himself. He was in consequence somewhat troubled, and had to summon up all his courage in order to go on with the inquiry and not blunder in his questions. He was amazed that Stepan should narrate the story of his crimes as if they had been things of long ago, and committed not by him but by some different man.

"Had you no pity for them?" asked Mahin.

"No. I did not know then."

"Well, and now?"

Stepan smiled with a sad smile. "Now," he said, "I would not do it even if I were to be burned alive."

"But why?"

"Because I have come to know that all men are brethren."

"What about me? Am I your brother also?"

"Of course you are."

"And how is it that I, your brother, am sending you to hard labour?"

"It is because you don't know."

"What do I not know?"

"Since you judge, it means obviously that you don't know."

"Go on. . . . What next?"

VI

Now it was not Chouev, but Stepan who used to read the gospel in the common cell. Some of the prisoners were singing coarse songs, while others listened to Stepan reading the gospel and talking about what he had read. The most attentive among those who listened were two of the prisoners, Vassily, and a convict called Mahorkin, a murderer who had become a hangman. Twice during his stay in this prison he was called upon to do duty as hangman, and both times in far-away places where nobody could be found to execute the sentences.

Two of the peasants who had killed Peter Nikolaevich Sventizky, had been sentenced to the gallows, and Mahorkin was ordered to go to Pensa to hang them. On all previous occasions he used to write a petition to the governor of the province--he knew well how to read and to write--stating that he had been ordered to fulfil his duty, and asking for money for his expenses. But now, to the greatest astonishment of the prison authorities, he said he did not intend to go, and added that he would not be a hangman any more.

"And what about being flogged?" cried the governor of the prison.

"I will have to bear it, as the law commands us not to kill."

"Did you get that from Pelageushkine? A nice sort of a prison prophet! You just wait and see what this will cost you!"

When Mahin was told of that incident, he was greatly impressed by the fact of Stepan's influence on the hangman, who refused to do his duty, running the risk of being hanged himself for insubordination.

VII

AT an evening party at the Eropkins, Mahin, who was paying attentions to the two young daughters of the house--they were rich matches, both of them--having earned great applause for his fine singing and playing the piano, began telling the company about the strange convict who had converted the hangman. Mahin told his story very accurately, as he had a very good memory, which was all the more retentive because of his total indifference to those with whom he had to deal. He never paid the slightest attention to other people's feelings, and was therefore better able to keep all they did or said in his memory. He got interested in Stepan Pelageushkine, and, although he did not thoroughly understand him, yet asked himself involuntarily what was the matter with the man? He could not find an answer, but feeling that there was certainly something remarkable going on in Stepan's soul, he told the company at the Eropkins all about Stepan's conversion of the hangman, and also about his strange behaviour in prison, his reading the Gospels and his great influence on the rest of the prisoners. All this made a special impression on the younger daughter of the family, Lisa, a girl of eighteen, who was just recovering from the artificial life she had been living in a boarding-school; she felt as if she had emerged out of water, and was taking in the fresh air of true life with ecstasy. She asked Mahin to tell her more about the man Pelageushkine, and to explain to her how such a great change had come over him. Mahin told her what he knew from the police official about Stepan's last murder, and also what he had heard from Pelageushkine himself--how he had been conquered by

the humility, mildness, and fearlessness of a kind woman, who had been his last victim, and how his eyes had been opened, while the reading of the Gospels had completed the change in him.

Lisa Eropkin was not able to sleep that night. For a couple of months a struggle had gone on in her heart between society life, into which her sister was dragging her, and her infatuation for Mahin, combined with a desire to reform him. This second desire now became the stronger. She had already heard about poor Maria Semenovna. But, after that kind woman had been murdered in such a ghastly way, and after Mahin, who learnt it from Stepan, had communicated to her all the facts concerning Maria Semenovna's life, Lisa herself passionately desired to become like her. She was a rich girl, and was afraid that Mahin had been courting her because of her money. So she resolved to give all she possessed to the poor, and told Mahin about it.

Mahin was very glad to prove his disinterestedness, and told Lisa that he loved her and not her money. Such proof of his innate nobility made him admire himself greatly. Mahin helped Lisa to carry out her decision. And the more he did so, the more he came to realise the new world of Lisa's spiritual ambitions, quite unknown to him heretofore.

VIII

ALL were silent in the common cell. Stepan was lying in his bed, but was not yet asleep. Vassily approached him, and, pulling him by his leg, asked him in a whisper to get up and to come to him. Stepan stepped out of his bed, and came up to Vassily.

"Do me a kindness, brother," said Vassily. "Help me!"

"In what?"

"I am going to fly from the prison."

Vassily told Stepan that he had everything ready for his flight.

"To-morrow I shall stir them up--" He pointed to the prisoners asleep in their beds. "They will give me away, and I shall be transferred to the cell in the upper floor. I know my way from there. What I want you for is to unscrew the prop in the door of the mortuary." "I can do that. But where will you go?"

"I don't care where. Are not there plenty of wicked people in every place?"

"Quite so, brother. But it is not our business to judge them."

"I am not a murderer, to be sure. I have not destroyed a living soul in my life. As for stealing, I don't see any harm in that. As if they have not robbed us!"

"Let them answer for it themselves, if they do."

"Bother them all! Suppose I rob a church, who will be hurt? This time I will take care not to break into a small shop, but will get hold of a lot of money, and then I will help people with it. I will give it to all good people."

One of the prisoners rose in his bed and listened. Stepan and Vassily broke off their conversation. The next day Vassily carried out his idea. He began complaining of the bread in prison, saying it was moist, and induced the prisoners to call the governor and to tell him of their discontent. The governor came, abused them all, and when he heard it was Vassily who had stirred up the men, he ordered him to be transferred into solitary confinement in the cell on the upper floor. This was all Vassily wanted.

IX

VASSILY knew well that cell on the upper floor. He knew its floor, and began at once to take out bits of it. When he had managed to get under the floor he took out pieces of the ceiling beneath, and jumped down into the mortuary a floor below. That day only one corpse was lying on the table. There in the corner of the room were stored bags to make hay mattresses for the prisoners. Vassily knew about the bags, and that was why the mortuary served his purposes. The prop in the door had been unscrewed and put in again. He took it out, opened the door, and went out into the passage to the lavatory which was being built. In the lavatory was a large hole connecting the third floor with the basement floor. After having found the door of the lavatory he went back to the mortuary, stripped the sheet off the dead body which was as cold as ice (in taking off the sheet Vassily touched his hand), took the bags, tied them together to make a rope, and carried the rope to the lavatory. Then he attached it to the cross-beam, and climbed down along it. The rope did not reach the ground, but he did not know how much was wanting. Anyhow, he had to take the risk. He remained hanging in the air, and then jumped down. His legs were badly hurt, but he could still walk on. The basement had two windows; he could have climbed out of one of them but for the grating protecting them. He had to break the grating, but there was no tool to do it with. Vassily began to look around him, and chanced on a piece of plank with a sharp edge; armed with that weapon he tried to loosen the bricks which held the grating. He worked a long time at that task. The cock crowed for the second time, but the grating still

held. At last he had loosened one side; and then he pushed the plank under the loosened end and pressed with all his force. The grating gave way completely, but at that moment one of the bricks fell down heavily. The noise could have been heard by the sentry. Vassily stood motionless. But silence reigned. He climbed out of the window. His way of escape was to climb the wall. An outhouse stood in the corner of the courtyard. He had to reach its roof, and pass thence to the top of the wall. But he would not be able to reach the roof without the help of the plank; so he had to go back through the basement window to fetch it. A moment later he came out of the window with the plank in his hands; he stood still for a while listening to the steps of the sentry. His expectations were justified. The sentry was walking up and down on the other side of the courtyard. Vassily came up to the outhouse, leaned the plank against it, and began climbing. The plank slipped and fell on the ground. Vassily had his stockings on; he took them off so that he could cling with his bare feet in coming down. Then he leaned the plank again against the house, and seized the water-pipe with his hands. If only this time the plank would hold! A quick movement up the water-pipe, and his knee rested on the roof. The sentry was approaching. Vassily lay motionless. The sentry did not notice him, and passed on. Vassily leaped to his feet; the iron roof cracked under him. Another step or two, and he would reach the wall. He could touch it with his hand now. He leaned forward with one hand, then with the other, stretched out his body as far as he could, and found himself on the wall. Only, not to break his legs in jumping down, Vassily turned round, remained hanging in the air by his hands, stretched himself out, loosened the grip of one hand, then the

other. "Help, me, God!" He was on the ground. And the ground was soft. His legs were not hurt, and he ran at the top of his speed. In a suburb, Malania opened her door, and he crept under her warm coverlet, made of small pieces of different colours stitched together.

X

THE wife of Peter Nikolaevich Sventizky, a tall and handsome woman, as quiet and sleek as a well-fed heifer, had seen from her window how her husband had been murdered and dragged away into the fields. The horror of such a sight to Natalia Ivanovna was so intense--how could it be otherwise?--that all her other feelings vanished. No sooner had the crowd disappeared from view behind the garden fence, and the voices had become still; no sooner had the barefooted Malania, their servant, run in with her eyes starting out of her head, calling out in a voice more suited to the proclamation of glad tidings the news that Peter Nikolaevich had been murdered and thrown into the ravine, than Natalia Ivanovna felt that behind her first sensation of horror, there was another sensation; a feeling of joy at her deliverance from the tyrant, who through all the nineteen years of their married life had made her work without a moment's rest. Her joy made her aghast; she did not confess it to herself, but hid it the more from those around. When his mutilated, yellow and hairy body was being washed and put into the coffin, she cried with horror, and wept and sobbed. When the coroner--a special coroner for serious cases--came and was taking her evidence, she noticed in the room, where the inquest was taking place, two peasants in irons, who had been charged as the principal culprits. One of them was an old man with a curly white beard, and a calm and severe countenance. The other was rather young, of a gipsy type, with bright eyes and curly dishevelled hair. She declared that they were the two men who had first seized hold of Peter Nikolaevich's hands. In spite of the gipsy-like

peasant looking at her with his eyes glistening from under his moving eyebrows, and saying reproachfully: "A great sin, lady, it is. Remember your death hour!"--in spite of that, she did not feel at all sorry for them. On the contrary, she began to hate them during the inquest, and wished desperately to take revenge on her husband's murderers.

A month later, after the case, which was committed for trial by court-martial, had ended in eight men being sentenced to hard labour, and in two--the old man with the white beard, and the gipsy boy, as she called the other--being condemned to be hanged, Natalia felt vaguely uneasy. But unpleasant doubts soon pass away under the solemnity of a trial. Since such high authorities considered that this was the right thing to do, it must be right.

The execution was to take place in the village itself. One Sunday Malania came home from church in her new dress and her new boots, and announced to her mistress that the gallows were being erected, and that the hangman was expected from Moscow on Wednesday. She also announced that the families of the convicts were raging, and that their cries could be heard all over the village.

Natalia Ivanovna did not go out of her house; she did not wish to see the gallows and the people in the village; she only wanted what had to happen to be over quickly. She only considered her own feelings, and did not care for the convicts and their families.

On Tuesday the village constable called on Natalia Ivanovna. He was a friend, and she offered him vodka and preserved mushrooms of her own making. The constable, after eating a little, told her that the execution was not to take place the next day.

"Why?"

"A very strange thing has happened. There is no hangman to be found. They had one in Moscow, my son told me, but he has been reading the Gospels a good deal and says: 'I will not commit a murder.' He had himself been sentenced to hard labour for having committed a murder, and now he objects to hang when the law orders him. He was threatened with flogging. 'You may flog me,' he said, 'but I won't do it.'"

Natalia Ivanovna grew red and hot at the thought which suddenly came into her head.

"Could not the death sentence be commuted now?"

"How so, since the judges have passed it? The Czar alone has the right of amnesty."

"But how would he know?"

"They have the right of appealing to him."

"But it is on my account they are to die," said that stupid woman, Natalia Ivanovna. "And I forgive them."

The constable laughed. "Well--send a petition to the Czar."

"May I do it?"

"Of course you may."

"But is it not too late?"

"Send it by telegram."

"To the Czar himself?"

"To the Czar, if you like."

The story of the hangman having refused to do his duty, and preferring to take the flogging instead, suddenly changed the soul of Natalia Ivanovna. The pity and the horror she felt the moment she heard that the peasants were sentenced to death, could not be stifled now, but filled her whole soul.

"Filip Vassilievich, my friend. Write that telegram for me. I want to appeal to the Czar to pardon them."

The constable shook his head. "I wonder whether that would not involve us in trouble?"

"I do it upon my own responsibility. I will not mention your name."

"Is not she a kind woman," thought the constable. "Very kind-hearted, to be sure. If my wife had such a heart, our life would be a paradise, instead of what it is now." And he wrote the telegram,--"To his Imperial Majesty, the Emperor. Your Majesty's loyal subject, the widow of Peter Nikolaevich Sventizky, murdered by the peasants, throws herself at the sacred feet (this sentence, when he wrote it down, pleased the constable himself most of all) of your Imperial Majesty, and implores you to grant an amnesty to the peasants so and so, from such a province, district, and village, who have been sentenced to death."

The telegram was sent by the constable himself, and Natalia Ivanovna felt relieved and happy. She had a feeling that since she, the widow of the murdered man, had forgiven the murderers, and was applying for an amnesty, the Czar could not possibly refuse it.

XI

LISA EROPKIN lived in a state of continual excitement. The longer she lived a true Christian life as it had been revealed to her, the more convinced she became that it was the right way, and her heart was full of joy.

She had two immediate aims before her. The one was to convert Mahin; or, as she put it to herself, to arouse his true nature, which was good and kind. She loved him, and the light of her love revealed the divine element in his soul which is at the bottom of all souls. But, further, she saw in him an exceptionally kind and tender heart, as well as a noble mind. Her other aim was to abandon her riches. She had first thought of giving away what she possessed in order to test Mahin; but afterwards she wanted to do so for her own sake, for the sake of her own soul. She began by simply giving money to any one who wanted it. But her father stopped that; besides which, she felt disgusted at the crowd of supplicants who personally, and by letters, besieged her with demands for money. Then she resolved to apply to an old man, known to be a saint by his life, and to give him her money to dispose of in the way he thought best. Her father got angry with her when he heard about it. During a violent altercation he called her mad, a raving lunatic, and said he would take measures to prevent her from doing injury to herself.

Her father's irritation proved contagious. Losing all control over herself, and sobbing with rage, she behaved with the greatest

impertinence to her father, calling him a tyrant and a miser.

Then she asked his forgiveness. He said he did not mind what she said; but she saw plainly that he was offended, and in his heart did not forgive her. She did not feel inclined to tell Mahin about her quarrel with her father; as to her sister, she was very cold to Lisa, being jealous of Mahin's love for her.

"I ought to confess to God," she said to herself. As all this happened in Lent, she made up her mind to fast in preparation for the communion, and to reveal all her thoughts to the father confessor, asking his advice as to what she ought to decide for the future.

At a small distance from her town a monastery was situated, where an old monk lived who had gained a great reputation by his holy life, by his sermons and prophecies, as well as by the marvellous cures ascribed to him.

The monk had received a letter from Lisa's father announcing the visit of his daughter, and telling him in what a state of excitement the young girl was. He also expressed the hope in that letter that the monk would influence her in the right way, urging her not to depart from the golden mean, and to live like a good Christian without trying to upset the present conditions of her life.

The monk received Lisa after he had seen many other people, and being

very tired, began by quietly recommending her to be modest and to submit to her present conditions of life and to her parents. Lisa listened silently, blushing and flushed with excitement. When he had finished admonishing her, she began saying with tears in her eyes, timidly at first, that Christ bade us leave father and mother to follow Him. Getting more and more excited, she told him her conception of Christ. The monk smiled slightly, and replied as he generally did when admonishing his penitents; but after a while he remained silent, repeating with heavy sighs, "O God!" Then he said, "Well, come to confession to-morrow," and blessed her with his wrinkled hands.

The next day Lisa came to confession, and without renewing their interrupted conversation, he absolved her and refused to dispose of her fortune, giving no reasons for doing so.

Lisa's purity, her devotion to God and her ardent soul, impressed the monk deeply. He had desired long ago to renounce the world entirely; but the brotherhood, which drew a large income from his work as a preacher, insisted on his continuing his activity. He gave way, although he had a vague feeling that he was in a false position. It was rumoured that he was a miracle-working saint, whereas in reality he was a weak man, proud of his success in the world. When the soul of Lisa was revealed to him, he saw clearly into his own soul. He discovered how different he was to what he wanted to be, and realised the desire of his heart.

Soon after Lisa's visit he went to live in a separate cell as a hermit,

and for three weeks did not officiate again in the church of the friary. After the celebration of the mass, he preached a sermon denouncing his own sins and those of the world, and urging all to repent.

From that day he preached every fortnight, and his sermons attracted increasing audiences. His fame as a preacher spread abroad. His sermons were extraordinarily fearless and sincere, and deeply impressed all who listened to him.

XII

VASSILY was actually carrying out the object he had in leaving the prison. With the help of a few friends he broke into the house of the rich merchant Krasnopuzov, whom he knew to be a miser and a debauchee. Vassily took out of his writing-desk thirty thousand roubles, and began disposing of them as he thought right. He even gave up drink, so as not to spend that money on himself, but to distribute it to the poor; helping poor girls to get married; paying off people's debts, and doing this all without ever revealing himself to those he helped; his only desire was to distribute his money in the right way. As he also gave bribes to the police, he was left in peace for a long time.

His heart was singing for joy. When at last he was arrested and put to trial, he confessed with pride that he had robbed the fat merchant. "The money," he said, "was lying idle in that fool's desk, and he did not even know how much he had, whereas I have put it into circulation and helped a lot of good people."

The counsel for the defence spoke with such good humour and kindness that the jury felt inclined to discharge Vassily, but sentenced him nevertheless to confinement in prison. He thanked the jury, and assured them that he would find his way out of prison before long.

XIII

NATALIA IVANOVNA SVENTIZKY'S telegram proved useless. The committee appointed to deal with the petitions in the Emperor's name, decided not even to make a report to the Czar. But one day when the Sventizky case was discussed at the Emperor's luncheon-table, the chairman of the committee, who was present, mentioned the telegram which had been received from Sventizky's widow.

"C'est tres gentil de sa part," said one of the ladies of the imperial family.

The Emperor sighed, shrugged his shoulders, adorned with epaulettes.

"The law," he said; and raised his glass for the groom of the chamber to pour out some Moselle.

All those present pretended to admire the wisdom of the sovereign's words. There was no further question about the telegram. The two peasants, the old man and the young boy, were hanged by a Tartar hangman from Kazan, a cruel convict and a murderer.

The old man's wife wanted to dress the body of her husband in a white shirt, with white bands which serve as stockings, and new boots, but she was not allowed to do so. The two men were buried together in the same pit outside the church-yard wall.

"Princess Sofia Vladimirovna tells me he is a very remarkable preacher," remarked the old Empress, the Emperor's mother, one day to her son: "Faites le venir. Il peut precher a la cathedrale."

"No, it would be better in the palace church," said the Emperor, and ordered the hermit Isidor to be invited.

All the generals, and other high officials, assembled in the church of the imperial palace; it was an event to hear the famous preacher.

A thin and grey old man appeared, looked at those present, and said: "In the name of God, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," and began to speak.

At first all went well, but the longer he spoke the worse it became. "Il devient de plus en plus aggressif," as the Empress put it afterwards. He fulminated against every one. He spoke about the executions and charged the government with having made so many necessary. How can the government of a Christian country kill men?

Everybody looked at everybody else, thinking of the bad taste of the sermon, and how unpleasant it must be for the Emperor to listen to it; but nobody expressed these thoughts aloud.

When Isidor had said Amen, the metropolitan approached, and asked him to call on him.

After Isidor had had a talk with the metropolitan and with the attorney-general, he was immediately sent away to a friary, not his own, but one at Suzdal, which had a prison attached to it; the prior of that friary was now Father Missael.

XIV

EVERY one tried to look as if Isidor's sermon contained nothing unpleasant, and nobody mentioned it. It seemed to the Czar that the hermit's words had not made any impression on himself; but once or twice during that day he caught himself thinking of the two peasants who had been hanged, and the widow of Sventizky who had asked an amnesty for them. That day the Emperor had to be present at a parade; after which he went out for a drive; a reception of ministers came next, then dinner, after dinner the theatre. As usual, the Czar fell asleep the moment his head touched the pillow. In the night an awful dream awoke him: he saw gallows in a large field and corpses dangling on them; the tongues of the corpses were protruding, and their bodies moved and shook. And somebody shouted, "It is you--you who have done it!" The Czar woke up bathed in perspiration and began to think. It was the first time that he had ever thought of the responsibilities which weighed on him, and the words of old Isidor came back to his mind. . . .

But only dimly could he see himself as a mere human being, and he could not consider his mere human wants and duties, because of all that was required of him as Czar. As to acknowledging that human duties were more obligatory than those of a Czar--he had not strength for that.

XV

HAVING served his second term in the prison, Prokofy, who had formerly worked on the Sventizky estate, was no longer the brisk, ambitious, smartly dressed fellow he had been. He seemed, on the contrary, a complete wreck. When sober he would sit idle and would refuse to do any work, however much his father scolded him; moreover, he was continually seeking to get hold of something secretly, and take it to the public-house for a drink. When he came home he would continue to sit idle, coughing and spitting all the time. The doctor on whom he called, examined his chest and shook his head.

"You, my man, ought to have many things which you have not got."

"That is usually the case, isn't it?"

"Take plenty of milk, and don't smoke."

"These are days of fasting, and besides we have no cow."

Once in spring he could not get any sleep; he was longing to have a drink. There was nothing in the house he could lay his hand on to take to the public-house. He put on his cap and went out. He walked along the street up to the house where the priest and the deacon lived together. The deacon's harrow stood outside leaning against the hedge. Prokofy approached, took the harrow upon his shoulder, and walked to an inn kept

by a woman, Petrovna. She might give him a small bottle of vodka for it. But he had hardly gone a few steps when the deacon came out of his house. It was already dawn, and he saw that Prokofy was carrying away his harrow.

"Hey, what's that?" cried the deacon.

The neighbours rushed out from their houses. Prokofy was seized, brought to the police station, and then sentenced to eleven months' imprisonment. It was autumn, and Prokofy had to be transferred to the prison hospital. He was coughing badly; his chest was heaving from the exertion; and he could not get warm. Those who were stronger contrived not to shiver; Prokofy on the contrary shivered day and night, as the superintendent would not light the fires in the hospital till November, to save expense.

Prokofy suffered greatly in body, and still more in soul. He was disgusted with his surroundings, and hated every one--the deacon, the superintendent who would not light the fires, the guard, and the man who was lying in the bed next to his, and who had a swollen red lip. He began also to hate the new convict who was brought into hospital. This convict was Stepan. He was suffering from some disease on his head, and was transferred to the hospital and put in a bed at Prokofy's side. After a time that hatred to Stepan changed, and Prokofy became, on the contrary, extremely fond of him; he delighted in talking to him. It was only after a talk with Stepan that his anguish would cease for a while.

Stepan always told every one he met about his last murder, and how it had impressed him.

"Far from shrieking, or anything of that kind," he said to Prokofy, "she did not move. 'Kill me! There I am,' she said. 'But it is not my soul you destroy, it is your own.'"

"Well, of course, it is very dreadful to kill. I had one day to slaughter a sheep, and even that made me half mad. I have not destroyed any living soul; why then do those villains kill me? I have done no harm to anybody . . ."

"That will be taken into consideration."

"By whom?"

"By God, to be sure."

"I have not seen anything yet showing that God exists, and I don't believe in Him, brother. I think when a man dies, grass will grow over the spot, and that is the end of it."

"You are wrong to think like that. I have murdered so many people, whereas she, poor soul, was helping everybody. And you think she and I are to have the same lot? Oh no! Only wait."

"Then you believe the soul lives on after a man is dead?"

"To be sure; it truly lives."

Prokofy suffered greatly when death drew near. He could hardly breathe. But in the very last hour he felt suddenly relieved from all pain. He called Stepan to him. "Farewell, brother," he said. "Death has come, I see. I was so afraid of it before. And now I don't mind. I only wish it to come quicker."

XVI

IN the meanwhile, the affairs of Eugene Mihailovich had grown worse and worse. Business was very slack. There was a new shop in the town; he was losing his customers, and the interest had to be paid. He borrowed again on interest. At last his shop and his goods were to be sold up. Eugene Mihailovich and his wife applied to every one they knew, but they could not raise the four hundred roubles they needed to save the shop anywhere.

They had some hope of the merchant Krasnopuzov, Eugene Mihailovich's wife being on good terms with his mistress. But news came that Krasnopuzov had been robbed of a huge sum of money. Some said of half a million roubles. "And do you know who is said to be the thief?" said Eugene Mihailovich to his wife. "Vassily, our former yard-porter. They say he is squandering the money, and the police are bribed by him."

"I knew he was a villain. You remember how he did not mind perjuring himself? But I did not expect it would go so far."

"I hear he has recently been in the courtyard of our house. Cook says she is sure it was he. She told me he helps poor girls to get married."

"They always invent tales. I don't believe it."

At that moment a strange man, shabbily dressed, entered the shop.

"What is it you want?"

"Here is a letter for you."

"From whom?"

"You will see yourself."

"Don't you require an answer? Wait a moment."

"I cannot." The strange man handed the letter and disappeared.

"How extraordinary!" said Eugene Mihailovich, and tore open the envelope. To his great amazement several hundred rouble notes fell out.

"Four hundred roubles!" he exclaimed, hardly believing his eyes. "What does it mean?"

The envelope also contained a badly-spelt letter, addressed to Eugene Mihailovich. "It is said in the Gospels," ran the letter, "do good for evil. You have done me much harm; and in the coupon case you made me wrong the peasants greatly. But I have pity for you. Here are four hundred notes. Take them, and remember your porter Vassily."

"Very extraordinary!" said Eugene Mihailovich to his wife and to himself. And each time he remembered that incident, or spoke about it to

his wife, tears would come to his eyes.

XVII

FOURTEEN priests were kept in the Suzdal friary prison, chiefly for having been untrue to the orthodox faith. Isidor had been sent to that place also. Father Missael received him according to the instructions he had been given, and without talking to him ordered him to be put into a separate cell as a serious criminal. After a fortnight Father Missael, making a round of the prison, entered Isidor's cell, and asked him whether there was anything he wished for.

"There is a great deal I wish for," answered Isidor; "but I cannot tell you what it is in the presence of anybody else. Let me talk to you privately."

They looked at each other, and Missael saw he had nothing to be afraid of in remaining alone with Isidor. He ordered Isidor to be brought into his own room, and when they were alone, he said,--"Well, now you can speak."

Isidor fell on his knees.

"Brother," said Isidor. "What are you doing to yourself! Have mercy on your own soul. You are the worst villain in the world. You have offended against all that is sacred . . ."

A month after Missael sent a report, asking that Isidor should be

released as he had repented, and he also asked for the release of the rest of the prisoners. After which he resigned his post.

XVIII

TEN years passed. Mitia Smokovnikov had finished his studies in the Technical College; he was now an engineer in the gold mines in Siberia, and was very highly paid. One day he was about to make a round in the district. The governor offered him a convict, Stepan Pelageushkine, to accompany him on his journey.

"A convict, you say? But is not that dangerous?"

"Not if it is this one. He is a holy man. You may ask anybody, they will all tell you so."

"Why has he been sent here?"

The governor smiled. "He had committed six murders, and yet he is a holy man. I go bail for him."

Mitia Smokovnikov took Stepan, now a bald-headed, lean, tanned man, with him on his journey. On their way Stepan took care of Smokovnikov, like his own child, and told him his story; told him why he had been sent here, and what now filled his life.

And, strange to say, Mitia Smokovnikov, who up to that time used to spend his time drinking, eating, and gambling, began for the first time to meditate on life. These thoughts never left him now, and produced

a complete change in his habits. After a time he was offered a very advantageous position. He refused it, and made up his mind to buy an estate with the money he had, to marry, and to devote himself to the peasantry, helping them as much as he could.

XIX

HE carried out his intentions. But before retiring to his estate he called on his father, with whom he had been on bad terms, and who had settled apart with his new family. Mitia Smokovnikov wanted to make it up. The old man wondered at first, and laughed at the change he noticed in his son; but after a while he ceased to find fault with him, and thought of the many times when it was he who was the guilty one.